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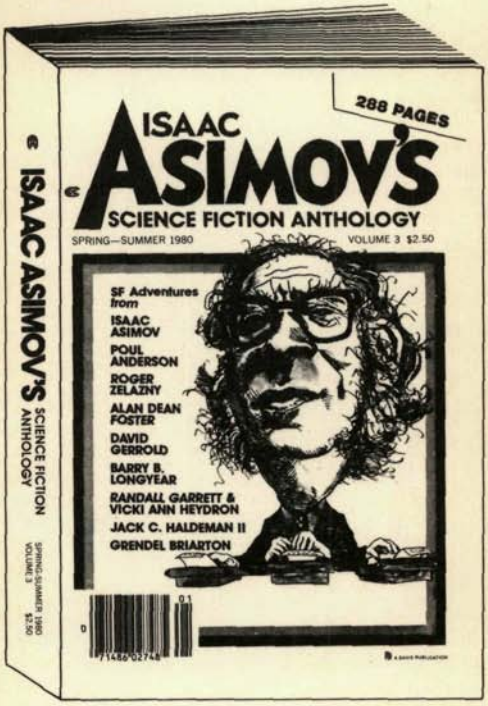

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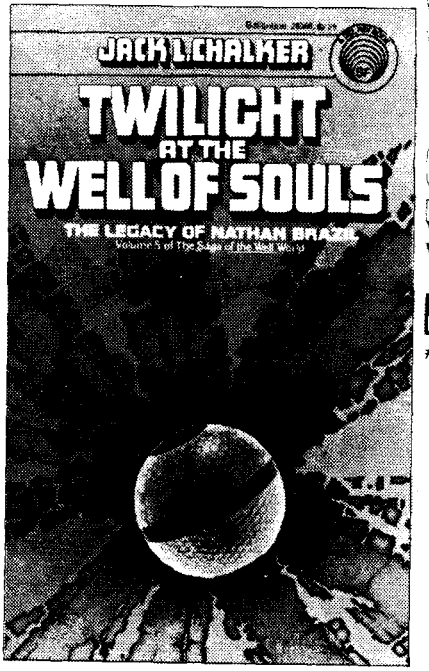

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EDITORIAL: THE MOSAIC AND THE PLATE GLASS

by Isaac Asimov

art: Frank Kelly Freas

I have always been reluctant to give reasoned judgements of individual stories, for I have no faith in my ability to see what is good and what is bad and why. That's one of the reasons I don't edit this magazine directly, and why I suffer in silence (almost) when George rejects one of my stories.

But I can't help having accumulated thoughts on writing in general in the course of my career; and, since I have this monthly forum, I feel I should share them with you on occasion. One of those thoughts involves a metaphor I heard of first from my good friend, science fiction's indefatigable photographer, Jay Kay Klein.

It seems there are two ways of writing fiction.

In one way, you pay more attention to the language itself than to the events you are describing. You are anxious to write colorfully, to paint a picture of the setting or the background of the events. You wish to evoke a mood in the reader which will make it possible for him to feel the events taking place more intensely than would be possible through a mere recounting.

This is not an easy thing to do well. There have been very many colorful phrases that have been so frequently employed in the past by other writers to evoke whatever it is you are trying to evoke that they have been used up and wrung dry. They have lost all capacity to do their work. Sometimes, even one use in the past knocks out a phrase, if that one use is very famous because it occurs in *Hamlet* or in the Gettysburg Address.

The effort to be colorful and yet to avoid the cliché is difficult. Sometimes considerable polishing and re-polishing is required to make things just right.

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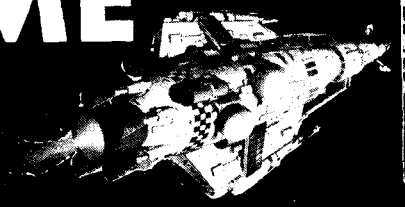

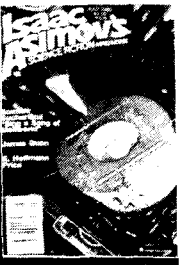

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And yet, though the phrases may be memorable, though the swing of the sentences may be grand, though the moods and emotions may be effectively evoked—the *story* may be just a little bit hard to understand.

Such writing is like a glorious mosaic built up out of pieces of colored glass. It may be a gorgeous spectacle and wonderful to look at; but if you're interested in seeing what's going on in the street, you're going to have a little trouble seeing through the mosaic.

Don't get me wrong. It is not necessarily important to understand something at once. In fact, brooding over and re-reading a well-written mosaic of a story may little by little illuminate you. You may find all kinds of symbolisms, all sorts of understandings on different levels. The fulfillment you will feel at achieving a deep understanding of something cannot be matched by instant surface "understanding."

If you have the time for it.

Let's face it. We're not all people of leisure. And even if we have leisure sometimes, there are many activities competing for the time we have at some particular period, and we may not feel able to spend the time on a work of literature that requires all of our sustained attention. Yet we would like to read a story. What can we do?

There's another kind of writing, too.

In this other kind, words and phrases are chosen not for their freshness and novelty, or for their unexpected ability to evoke a mood, but simply for their ability to describe what is going on without themselves getting in the way. Everything is subordinated to clarity. It is the kind of writing in which the direct sentence is preferred to the involved subordinate clause; the familiar word to the unfamiliar word; and the short word to the long word.

This does not mean there are no involved subordinate clauses, and no unfamiliar or long words. It does mean that these devices are used only when it is necessary to do so for clarity. *All things being equal*, you plump for the direct, the familiar, the short.

The result is that you can see what's happening with absolute clarity (if the writing is handled well enough). Ideally, you're not even aware of the writing.

Such writing might be compared to plate glass in a window. You can see exactly what's going on in the street, and you're not aware of the glass.

As it happens, many critics value only the mosaics. They are used to achieving an understanding beyond that of less expert readers (or of affecting one, for if there are more bad writers than good

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writers, there are also more incompetent critics than competent ones), and they become uneasy if something is too clear and simple. If everyone can understand a work of art, after all, what need is there for a critic? Since the critic stands in danger of losing his job (or, worse, his shaky self-respect) in the presence of plate-glass writing, his usual reaction is to dismiss it as "superficial," "without style," "non-significant," and a few other carefully memorized adjectives.

Indeed, it might even seem that they are right. If we look first at a good mosaic and then at a good plate-glass window, we would have to be totally lacking in judgement to fail to see that the former is a work of art while the latter is just a utilitarian object.

Yet mosaics of great artistic value were created out of colored glass as long ago as the 3rd century B.C., while plate glass was not successfully manufactured until the 17th century.

In other words, it took two thousand years to progress from colored glass that made marvelous mosaics, to something as simple and "nothing" as clear glass without streaks, wobbles, or bubbles. Strange that something so "simple" should be so much more technically difficult to manufacture than something "artistic."

And it is so in literature, too. Because one story is written very artistically, very poetically, very stylishly, it is easy to see that it was difficult to write and that it required great skill in the creation. But because another story is written so simply and clearly that you're not aware of the writing, doesn't mean that there was no trouble in the writing at all. It may well have been more difficult to insert clarity than to insert poetry. There is a great deal of art to creating something that seems artless.

I know one writer (his initials are I.A. and I'm very close to him) who's been told on numerous occasions— "I don't know that you're exactly a writer, but you're a good story-teller."

The jackasses who say this intend to be condescending; but I smile and feel complimented, for it's not easy to tell a story well. If you don't believe that, stop people at random and ask them to tell you a story. If you keep it up for an unbroken period of as little as three hours, you may never recover your sanity.

Writing in such a fashion that the writing is unnoticeable, that the events described pass directly into your brain as though you were experiencing them yourself, is a difficult and a necessary art.

Sometimes you *want* to see what's happening in the street and even the smallest imperfection in the glass in the window will annoy you. And sometimes you *want* to read a story and be carried along

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with the events rapidly and smoothly, without even the smallest imperfection in the writing to remind you that you are only reading and not experiencing.

Well, then, suppose we have two stories; a mosaic and a plate-glass. They are not directly comparable, to be sure, but suppose that they (each in its own way) are equally good. In that case, which should one choose? If it were I making the choice, I would plump for the plate glass every time. It's what I like to write and what I like to read.

But our readers are numerous and their tastes are by no means universally identical to mine. It is up to George and Shawna and the rest of the staff to see that, in this respect and in a number of others, too, the magazine ends with a reasonable mix to satisfy a variety of reading preferences.

A story has to be *good*, but beyond that, we want variety.

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ON BOOKS
by Baird Searles

The Shadow of the Torturer by Gene Wolfe, Simon and Schuster, $11.95.
The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories by Gene Wolfe, Pocket Books, $2.95 (paper).
Charmed Life by Diana Wynne Jones, Pocket Books, $2.25 (paper).
Galactic Warlord by Douglas Hill, Atheneum, $7.95.
Green Is For Galanx by Josephine Rector Stone, Atheneum, $8.95.
Unicorns in the Rain by Barbara Cohen, Atheneum, $8.95.
Till We Have Faces by C. S. Lewis, Harvest HBJ, $3.95 (paper).
The Fires of Lan-Kern by Peter Tremayne, St. Martin's, $10.95.

Relatively suddenly, there seems to be a new style of science fiction cropping up. Not completely new, of course (is there such a thing?); its antecedents can be traced back a ways but are so sparse that I always thought of them as highly individual authors at work rather than as a subgenre. But enough recent works seem to be echoing this new new wave to make me wonder if we're not in for a trend.

I certainly hope so, since it's a style I like immensely. I haven't come across a term for it yet—for the time being I'm thinking of it as Baroque science fiction—and to start off, let me quote my dictionary on several definitions of Baroque which led me to that term: ". . . a style of art and architecture characterized by much ornamentation and curved rather than straight lines" or ". . . a style of music characterized by highly embellished melodies" or "fantastically decorated; gaudily ornate."

Beginning to get the idea? Now as for the literary ancestors, my first thought, without going really far back, is Dickens. I probably wouldn't have come up with him save for the direct connection between that worthy genius of the English language and the first example that's directly linked to the field we're concerned with here, Mervyn Peake's extraordinary Gormenghast trilogy (which to compound confusion he himself dubbed "neo-Gothic").

These books are deservedly renowned among fantasy lovers, which is in a way curious since nothing fantastic happens in them;

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the fantasy is implicit in the settings and characters, not in the events of the plot.

From there the trail leads through the Atlan series of Jane Gaskell; also fantasy rather than science fiction since the setting is an exotic antedeluvian Earth where man and dinosaur co-exist. Gaskell's characters and events are dished out with a bizarre fecundity that's about as Baroque as you can get.

Four of the five Atlan books are from the 1960s; since then, no one has really written quite this way except perhaps Jack Vance, whose work of the past decade has been fanciful in the extreme, but lighter and closer to whimsy than what I'm discussing here. (To stretch a point, Vance might be called Rococo.)

But in the past year or so, there have been several major works that are characterized by what is almost a superfluity of imagination and image, by rich and varied language, characters, and events (as opposed to plot, which in some cases is simple to the point of non-existence), and by settings that are lush and usually downright decadent. And curiously enough, these recent examples have, with perhaps one exception, been science fiction rather than fantasy, laid in alternate Earths or a vastly far future.

I am thinking, of course, of Moorcock's *Gloriana,* Gaskell's *Some Summer Lands* (the capstone of the Atlan series), Silverberg's *Lord Valentine's Castle*, Vinge's *The Snow Queen* and Card's *Songmaster*. And the latest, and maybe the best, is Gene Wolfe's *The Shadow of the Torturer.*

I should make it clear that part of the common quality of these books is their very uncommonness; the similarity lies only in this hectic, pyrotechnic phantasmagoricality, and that they are all brilliant achievements.

And hell to review, come to think of it. Style is almost all, here, and communicating style is like describing *Fantasia* to a man blind from birth. A mere capsulization of the plot of *The Shadow of the Torturer,* I can tell in advance, just ain't gonna work. For instance:

The hero, Severian, is a journeyman of the torturer's guild, the Order of the Seekers for Truth and Penitence, in the Citadel of the huge city of Nessus, on an Earth of the unimaginably far future. Eons, and at least one Ice Age, have passed; mankind has got to the stars, and vice versa, but that traffic is as far from the experience of the ordinary citizen as a Transatlantic hop in the Concorde is to a present-day Afghanistani tribesman.

Because he has shown mercy (i.e. provided a quick death) to a "client" he is in effect exiled to a far distant city. Nessus is so

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enormous that it takes him days to get to its gates; he has strange adventures with the outré inhabitants of the city, and the book ends as he reaches the world outside Nessus. (FYI, this is the first book of a tetralogy collectively entitled *The Book of the New Sun;* stand warned that the end of this volume is not a cliff-hanger, but the closest thing to it.)

See what I mean? In no way can that convey the pell mell and bizarre host of people, places, and happenings that Wolfe throws at the reader. Maybe a quote will give an idea of the richness of writing and ideas. This one is on the antiquity of Severian's world:

". . . the scholars write that the kind of sand the artists call polychrome (because flecks of every color are mixed with its whiteness) is actually not sand at all, but the glass of the past, now pounded to powder by aeons of tumbling in the clamorous sea."

Every page, every paragraph, almost every sentence has wondrous ideas such as that one. Wolfe's vocabulary is also staggering; word collectors will have a field day figuring out which are of his invention, which are real. (I couldn't believe, for instance, that "epopt" was a word until my OED assured me that it was.)

Baroque or not, trend-setting or not, *The Shadow of the Torturer* is a strange and wonderful book, and I am going to have a hard time waiting for the second of the series.

I wish I could be as enthusiastic about the collection of Wolfe's short stories that was released at about the same time as the novel, *The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories.* Part of the problem is the problem of the modern science fiction short story in general; without making a Ph.D. thesis out of it, writers such as Wolfe and the others mentioned above need the room the novel provides to create their worlds in depth; and this applies equally to the other side of the SF spectrum, the high-tech writers such as Niven and Hogan. I firmly believe that the axiom "the short story is the ideal form for SF" is long out of date; too many contemporary examples give the impression of being fragments of novels.

This certainly holds for the title story of the Wolfe collection. The story's about a book (which seems to be a pulp version of *The Island of Dr. Moreau)* whose characters emerge from its pages and come alive for a young boy. Wolfe is also here prone to touches of whimsy which I find a bit forced. Two other stories in the collection bear the names "The Death of Dr. Island" and "The Doctor of Death Island." The former is about a curious mental institution—a sentient island ("Dr. Island") in an artificial sea on a constructed satellite of Jupiter; the latter about another institution of the future, a prison, and what

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a prisoner finds there on waking from a prolonged cryogenic sleep. Curiously enough, much of what he does find has to do with the works of Dickens, to which Wolfe makes consistent references. And so, coincidentally and absolutely meaninglessly, we have come full circle. What the Dickens?

Everybody's favorite fantasist suddenly seems to be the English writer Diana Wynne Jones. I say suddenly because a couple of her books have just become available in American mass market paperback; in reality she already has a respectable list of books to her credit in England and here in hard cover.

I've now read three of her novels, not one of which was like the others. To hand at the moment is *Charmed Life,* and I must admit to finding it enchanting.

Like so many English books of its kind, one might think *Charmed Life* a juvenile, mainly because the protagonist is a child. But this tale of a world where magic as a skill is more or less taken for granted is told with such sophistication and a kind of black humor that it certainly transcends such simple categorization.

Cat Chant's sister, Gwendolen, is a practicing witch (and a practicing bitch, for that matter), but he himself seems to have no talent. What happens when their parents are killed in a paddle steamer accident (!) and they go to live in the castle of the mysterious Chrestomanci is sheer chaos, since Chrestomanci won't let Gwendolen practice witchcraft. All hell breaks loose with Gwendolen's attempts at revenge; eventually involved are the most spoiled dragon in the world, a violin that's turned into a cat (naturally called "Fiddle"), alternate worlds and an alternate Gwendolen, some highly unpleasant giant insects, the Government, and a host of other inventive and hilarious factors. A really good fantasy that's also this funny is a rare object indeed.

Speaking of juveniles, it's a curious fact that there's a whole subgenre of juvenile science fiction being published of which the general SF reading public is unaware. They are usually done in hard cover and bought mainly by libraries, though some few turn up as mass market paperbacks eventually. A publisher noted for its initial publication of excellent fantasies has devoted more publishing effort lately to just this kind of "children's" SF, and I thought I'd take a quick sampling. The two books I picked are certainly a cut above some other examples I've run into by authors who seemed to know little about fiction and even less about science.

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Galactic Warlord by Douglas Hill suffers from the cliché title of the decade, but otherwise is a pretty good novel. It is a short, succinct, and well written space opera about the only (?) survivor of a planetary mercenary-type culture which had been wiped out by an unknown enemy, his search for other survivors and the who that dunnit, and his encounter with a mysterious bunch of super Good Guys who are after a super Bad Guy who is causing wars all over the inhabited Galaxy. It took me back to the good old days of uncomplicated shoot-'em-up pulp stories.

I am a bit surprised at the glorification of militaristic discipline and fighting in *Galactic Warlord;* I thought that sort of thing was very out of fashion in juvenile literature. Not that I'm necessarily being disapproving, mind you; I think we could use a legion or two from the planet Moros right now.

Galactic Warlord is the first of a projected series.

Josephine Rector Stone's *Green is For Galanx* is a very different sort of book. It is chock-full of rather original concepts, some of them so sophisticated that I'm not sure that someone without a pretty strong background in SF would get all of them. They come so thick and fast, in fact, that the plot, thin at best, gets a little lost.

Willy's World is a self-contained, artificial satellite that has been wandering around the universe for several generations (shades of *Space: 1999* and *Lost in Space*!). It is a despotism that's not all that benevolent, and a group of mutant children with psi powers and their guardian, Ilona, fear that the children will be killed in order to analyze their talents for adaptation to android mentalities. When the chance comes, the group, accompanied by the shape-changing Galanx which they've more or less adopted as a pet, escapes to a new planet. There they must cope with the strangeness of a natural world, and escape the inevitable pursuit.

Despite the helter-skelter pace of the plot, this is a book not without interest or originality. The youngsters seem to be getting material of some quality that the adults might be missing.

And from that same publisher, another of their sterling fantasies. This one is called *Unicorns in the Rain;* it's by Barbara Cohen and it's absolutely agonizing to review, because somewhere in the first fifty pages, one has a dawning revelation that the novel is Not What It Seems, and wild unicorns would not drag out of me what it really is. Do Not—repeat—Do Not read the cover blurb; the revelation is so delicious when it happens.

I *can* tell you that despite the title, I soon thought I was reading a work of science fiction, since the setting seems one more of those

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dreary futures overrun with drugs and violence. It is not; and while I'm human enough to want to drop some hints, I will be kind and not do so, except what I hope to be an obscure one. The title is closely related to a classic Charles Addams cartoon of several decades ago. The book as a whole, by the way, is touching, simple, and a little disturbing.

And speaking of mythology (you didn't think I was, did you?), a very beautiful novel by C. S. Lewis has just been reprinted. Considering how popular the Narnia books and the Perelandra trilogy are, Lewis's only other true novel is very little known. It is called *Till We Have Faces* and is retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche. Lewis fans should certainly make a point of discovering it.

And a note on this reprint. It is actually a trade (oversized) paperback at a reasonable price. It's not profusely illustrated, but has several handsome drawings by Fritz Eichenberg. So it *can* be done.

Despite what some might think, I really try to read books for this column that I think I'll be able to like and/or write positively about. But sometimes I err, which is as painful for me as anybody else. Peter Tremayne's *The Fires of Lan-Kern* was one such mistake.

It starts out promisingly enough; a nuclear sub is subjected to a

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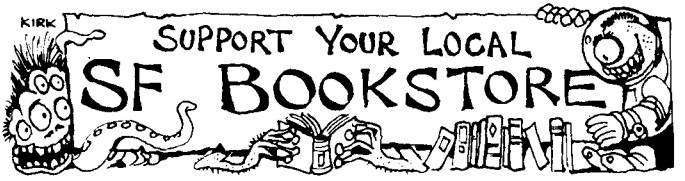
mysterious sort of flash-freezing and the crew "wakes" many miles off-course and in a world that seems strangely devoid of humanity.

But it's just another post-holocaust; the sub blows up, leaving but one survivor (a botanist—now *that's* original), who falls in with the dreariest bunch of psuedo-Celts ever to wield a sword. The publisher proclaims on the jacket that "it offers a deeply philosophical approach to life." In that case, so do the Conan books. But at least they're fun.



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THE WHEELS OF DREAM

by John M. Ford

art: Alex Schomburg

This story is—kind of—a companion to the author's "The Sapphire as Big as the Marsport Hilton," and another in the series is in preparation.

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The gravity on Phobos is only one-five-hundredth that of Earth. If not for this fact, Hembersmith-Byrne would not have met Dr. Castelperugio, subsequent events would not have taken their extraordinary turn, the face of the Solar System would be different—and *then* where would we be?

"Publican!" Hembersmith-Byrne said to the Phobostown bartender, in a voice used to being raised. "Glenlivet, if you please."

Sir Isambard Hembersmith-Byrne was short, about 165 cm, and not quite broad enough to make up for it. His skin was rough and ruddy, and his hair, called "auburn," was rather a flaming red doused with sand. That hair, brush-cut on top, grew bushy above his eyes and crawled down the sides of his face and over his upper lip in cavalry whiskers that were eminently thumbable. He wore a tan whipcord jacket with a red scarf at the throat and a medal on the breast, dark brown trousers and low black boots with griplon spats. Their heels were hooked on the barstool rungs. The stool's seatbelt hung loose down its side.

The barman's hand paused above his keyboard; with the other hand he riffled through a booklet of formulas. Then he hit the buttons. The bar shot congeners, color, and diluent into straight ethyl alcohol and made a glass of Scotch whisky. The bartender slipped a griplon coaster sleeve on the glass and placed it on the stick-nylon bartop before Hembersmith-Byrne, with a neat twist to stick it down securely.

Sir Isambard put down a silver decagram and lifted the glass, wincing at the rip of the parting griplons. He put the drink to his mouth, and his teeth came down on the plastic sip-cap, away from the opening. He cursed briefly but brightly, rotated the glass and drank.

He felt better at once, warmed head and heart. Glenlivet is a powerful Celtic whisky, not like your butter-mellow blends; it is the Calvinism of Scotch. And the sip-caps did keep the barmen from icing it.

Behind Hembersmith-Byrne the bar was just short of crowded. There were semiRussians from the Lagranges, postChinese from the Moon, lots of Martians, and rockfolk who owed nothin' to nobody. There were even a few well-dwellers from Earth, easily seen by their movements, but Sir Isambard did not look twice at them. There were people in shipsleeves and casual tunics, some in long robes and one in a soft pressure suit complete but for helmet and lifepack. There were overdressed folk with tippets and dagging and ornate embroidery, and a few in shoulder bags and bare skin otherwise.

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Beyond the moon's orbit the second favorite indoor sport is drinking (the first, say some, is lying) and here was a veritable Olympiad.

The tavern's name was ClaustroPhobia. In its center was a glass Terrarium with sand, plants, water, ugly amphibious lizards, and an electric sun. Around the room walls were filmed views of various cities, giving the impression that one was high in an urban skyscraper after having lost one eye and all depth perception. The scenes changed: Nieuw York, Arcosanti, Marsport, Brasilia, Lagrange Four A, Akademgorodok, the Tower of Confucius at Clavius Crater. There were rough-hewn wooden ceiling beams cast from urethane foam, an oak backbar done in paraplast, brass lamps which were evidently real brass but had electric flames. Hembersmith-Byrne had been drawn to the place by its homelike atmosphere.

Somebody put silver in the music machine and a band began to play. Hembersmith-Byrne's ears lifted visibly. The tune was distorted, synthesized, syncopated—but it was unmistakably "Garryowen".

Sir Isambard trembled a bit, drank to still his lips, drummed his fingers on the bar in rhythm.

A verse went by mangled, then a chorus, and Sir Isambard finally broke down and *whispered* the words:

"Let Bacchus' sons be not dismayed,
But join with me, each jovial blade
Come drink and sing and lend your aid
To help me with the chorus—"

And, with a tear in his eye, a lump in his throat, a fog in his head, the words burst out:

"Away with spa, we'll drink brown ale
And pay the reck'ning on the nail
No man for debt shall go to jail
For Garryowen and glo-ry!"

He did not take notice of who was watching him. He did not notice the turn of the head of a dark-haired woman in green who sat drinking alone. He did not notice her look or it would have stopped him cold.

"We are the boys who take delight in
Smashing the Liverpool lamps when lightin'—"

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He did notice, then, that his glass was empty. "Publican, another," he called, "and one for the house—" and smashed his fist down hard on the bar.

Hembersmith-Byrne's Phobos weight was only one hundred fifty grams, his seatbelt was unfastened, and his griplon spats touched only bare brass. He shot up from his stool at a steep angle; impacted one of the beams, leaving a head-shaped dent in it; and drifted down toward the Terrarium. He saw where he was headed. He need have done nothing; he did not weigh enough to strain the glass. But he kicked sidewise, caromed off and landed with a *whump* on the table of the woman in green, right next to her bottle and glass without upsetting either.

"Garryowen" clicked off just then, and there was a sudden silence so total that the longtime rockfolk all checked for life-support breakdown.

Hembersmith-Byrne looked sidelong at the dark-haired woman. She had lovely eyes, and a lovelier grin.

"A thousand pardons, madam," he said, and tried to get up. He didn't. The cloth of his jacket was anchored firmly to the griplon tablecloth. The spread was fastened to the table. The table was bolted to the floor. That's the way it is in Phobic gravity.

"Excuse me, madam; only be a moment," he said, and tried to scoot downward, at least enough to get his feet on the floor. The table would have none of that. He pushed with his elbows, which served only to lock his sleeves and shoulders tighter.

The woman said "Would you like me to—"

"Not at all, madam, hardly necessary—if you will kindly, ah, remove your glassware, however. . . ."

She did so, and got up herself. Hembersmith-Byrne pulled his feet up—grateful for some little help from this blasted gravity—and put the heels of his boots on the table edge, careful not to let the spats touch more griplon.

He kicked down hard. There was a great and terrible rending, and Sir Isambard went literally heels-over-head in a backward somersault off the table. His head came up, his backside struck the wall, and he slid down to land erect.

There was a rousing cheer, and a voice said, "Did that one on the house refer to a drink, mate, or the floor show?"

Hembersmith-Byrne dusted his cuffs and smoothed the hem of his jacket. He pulled a gold decagram from his pocket and tossed it—straight-line, not in an arc—to the barman.

The woman in green, bottle and glass in her hands, was between

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Sir Isambard and the door. He bowed stiffly, said, "With your permission, madam," and took a step.

She stepped in front of him. "No."

"I—beg your pardon?"

"You've done that already. You've got it. And then you asked my permission to leave. That you haven't got. Not yet. What's your name?"

"Sir Isambard Hembersmith-Byrne, madam."

Her face sagged a little. "Is Ms. Hembersmith—"

"There is none, madam. That is my full name and mine alone."

"Ah." The grin came back. It was still pretty. "Earthside?"

"British, madam."

"Oh, stop the 'madam's. You'll make me feel like something I'm not. I'm Urania Castelperugio. That mean anything to you?"

"Named for the muse of astronomy?"

"Wow. I couldn't count on the Scatterer's fingers how many times I've had to spell it out—and then explained it was Oo-rah-nee-ah-dammit, not You-rainy-ah. Now tell me you've heard of me and I'll know you're a liar."

"I fear not."

"You fear—I swear by the Scatterer's Hangman you're the oddest rabbit in this hole. 'Sir'—does that mean you're a knight?"

Sir Isambard coughed. "Yes. Indeed. K.B. and all that."

"Well. Tell you what. Come with me and let's talk." She held up her bottle. "And I'll buy you one."

She turned. He hesitated. She turned back. "Hey, come on. Nothing to worry about. Besides, what would I do with a name like Hembersmith-Byrne-Castelperugio?"

Sir Isambard thumbed his whiskers and followed her out, placing his feet very carefully on the floor.

Dr. Urania Castelperugio, M.D. Ph.D., was not conventionally beautiful. Her eyes were two large miracles, but her nose was big. Her smile was a delight, but her chin was flat. Her hair was smooth and rich, but cut short to suit helmets. Her wrists and ankles and waist were somewhat thick—in fact, she was a little bit thick everywhere except inside her head. That part of her was sharp and exquisitely featured.

She was rather reminiscent of one of those Renaissance ladies who had what the age called *virtú*, Caterina Sforza or Margaret d'Anjou. Their portraits do not turn the modern knee to water. But their actions did. There was nothing, not empire, not war, that those

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women did not dare and then do.

"My wits have got me . . . what? Well, money, and lots of that. All the air I can breathe, plus the necessities. My warren down here's larger than some towns on Vesta, Juno . . . big as any single outpost on Phobos.

"But I'm not famous. Nobody knows who I am, outside of a few medical journals. And that's wrong, Sir Isambard . . . I ought to be famous. I—I made our whole culture possible, just with one little invention."

"Which was?"

She leaned conspiratorially close. "I invented the Switch."

Not long after the millennium, the intrauterine contraceptive device had been almost perfected. It was now perfectly safe, perfectly effective. But it was not perfectly convenient. One had to go to a medstation to change one's mind, and while medstations are always open they are not always nearby on the, well, spur of the moment.

Then the Switch was added, and the IUD was perfect: it became controllable. Further, it had *controlled* controllability. To turn the Switch off still required a visit to a medstation, and a deliberate magnetic signal, and by corollary some reconsidering time. To turn it back on, to infertility, required only a touch of a magnet to the skin. And a feature called Fertility Failsafe automatically turned it on in ten days.

Make no mistake, there had been a revolution in the last twenty years.

"I make a gram of gold on every one of the things. That's a lot of gold. And the market will never disappear—because you *can* turn it off.

"But they didn't name it after me. Because of my name. My *name,* Scatterer sing to the sun. Ever heard of Doctor George Papanicolaou?"

"Greek, I presume?"

"Hey, you're good with Greek. You presume right. Ol' George invented a test for cancer that's saved, on the low end, a couple million women's lives. But 'Papa . . . ' you get the idea, was just too much for the public's feeble memory. So it's the Pap test, will be forever, and the only people who know who Papanicolaou was are the same eight medical librarians who know me . . . I seriously considered changing it, for a while. To Switch."

"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," Sir Isambard said. He sat in a chair with seatbelt fastened, a large whisky stuck to a table nearby. Urania sat cross-legged on the carpet—shag, not

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griplon—her shoes discarded by the door. The room was large and comfortable, with a minimum of griplon and a maximum of soft surfaces. A triplepane ceiling showed black heaven above and the red curve of Mars.

"You're just saying that to be—oh Scatterer drop me hard. You're not. Not with a name like that."

"That isn't all. *All* is Isambard Arthur St. George Fitzwarin Hembersmith-Byrne. There was an odd thing happened to me, too, y'know. I was Engineer-Royal. By special appointment to His Majesty James IV."

"You're an engineer . . . ?" There was something new and different in her eyes, her face and voice.

"Madam, I was quite *the* engineer. For a while. . . .

"History is full of great engineers named Isambard," said Hembersmith-Byrne, the whisky aboil in his brain. "There was a French bridgebuilder, about 1200—Isembert, technically, but they weren't too particular about spelling then. Whanne in Aprille, if you follow my meaning. Isembert came to England under special charter to John Lackland—"

"Robin Hood's King John?"

"If you must. He came to complete London Bridge—yes, the one that was moved to America, and may go to Marsport.

"Some centuries later, there was Marc Isambard Brunel, who invented the tunneling machine and caused holes to be dug through practically every intervening stone in Europe. The great Deeres that Phobostown was dug with are on the same principle.

"Marc Brunel's son was Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the greatest engineer of his time—damnation, of his century, and several before, and possibly since. Builder of steel suspension bridges; of the great iron ship *Great Eastern*, over two hundred meters bow to afterdeck, whose launching cost fifteen hundred dollars for each decimeter of the slipway, and over a dozen lives; of the Great Western—'God's Wonderful—' Railway, which for stability and safety at hitherto unheard-of speeds had a gauge between rails of *not* the standard four feet eight and one-half inches but seven magnificent feet one-quarter-inch. And *he* was shorter than I am." Hembersmith-Byrne took a breath, only to sigh it out. "Like life, I suppose, I am solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

"And then?" Dr. Castelperugio said, her eyes like coals.

"I.K.B. was the high point, I fear. In the early years of the millennium there was Kenneth Isambard O'Donnell. His great project, finally achieved, was to lay solar power grids over great chunks of

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the Scottish Highlands and virtually the entire Isle of Man."

"Those would be the O'Donnell Grids."

"You see, madam, one's name can be *too* closely attached to one's creations. Yes indeed. Poor O'Donnell had no sooner finished copper-plating the British Isles than the Land's End fusion plant went on line. It broke him, my dear, absolutely broke him in two."

"And you, now."

"And now I. I was at least knighted, y'know—they were saving Old Ken's, and he never did see it.

"I designed the English Channel Tunnel."

"But they built that, didn't they? I thought it was a big success."

"Oh, the Tunnel is, yes. But they didn't build the one I designed.

"You have to understand, there's been talk of a Chunnel since the nineteenth century. For a time there was practically a cottage industry in plans for the thing. But with the way things were with the French, and then the way they got to be with the Germans, then the French again, then the Germans again—and so on—well, no wonder so many people *swam* the bloody thing.

"Then twelve years ago it was decided to make the Tunnel a Great British Effort, an Idea Whose Time Had Come, never mind that its time had really come and gone a hundred years ago. You space-dwelling folk, you don't understand what it's like on the Earth, when everyone with the least horizons can take passage one-way off the world. . . .

"I was pulled out of the Royal Engineers, created the Engineer-Royal, given a drub from the good king's sword and a jolly open purse. Told to tunnel through the deeps. I think it was because of my name, y'know; I can't think why else, unless . . . "

"Unless what?"

"I'll return to that. My staff and I planned, and calculated, and consumed square kilometers of drafting film—as I say, we had quite enough inspiration to draw on. And we completed the planning, ahead of schedule and under budget. We had drawings, and lovely artist's conceptions, and scale plastic models with lift-away parts to show the works inside—"

"You said 'shedule'."

"I beg your pardon?"

"That's three times you've done that. You said 'shedule'."

"Indeed. Schedule. Timetable. Programme."

"Shorry. Mush be th' whishky."

Hembersmith-Byrne's eyes narrowed, causing his eyebrows to curl menacingly. He continued: "There was a grand presentation,

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finally, to His Majesty. The King nodded blandly at our renderings, and there was a curious twitch in his eye. Finally he lifted the top from our cross-sectional model, pointed an accusing finger—and you've never seen a finger accuse till you've seen a king's—and said 'Sir Isambard, whatever is that?'

"I replied 'The locomotive, Your Majesty. That particular one is a Siemens 5000-horsepower goods engine, with fifty wagons of English produce bound for the continent.' Well, the cameras *were* on us, don't y'know, and the Siemens *is* a lovely beast.

"Then Good King James's face goes tight as a drumhead, and he says 'This won't do, Hembersmith-Byrne; won't do at all,' and he turns and walks out. The journalists trail after on their coaxial strings, and in a twinkling no one's left but me and one poor devil of a caterer, who's brought an enormous cake in the shape of a goods wagon with an icing Union Jack on the side. Loaded with English produce for the continent.

"It seems that British Leyland was about to introduce its new improved metal-hydride-solid-oxidizer automobile, that would make Britain the linchpin of the coming hydrogen economy. And that plan did not call for *railways* in the Tunnel to Europe, not at all. I had backed the wrong iron horse."

"But why weren't you *told?*"

"I see, madam, that you know little of government projects. . . . They laid the tunnel, of course; and a good three-fourths of the design was taken from my papers. I have my knighthood, which is still quite something, and the Disbursements people were finally convinced that Engineers-Royal, Retired, ought to get a few grammes annuity. And for months thereafter I could have cake with my tea."

Hembersmith-Byrne refilled Dr. Castelperugio's glass, then his own. She shifted position (carefully so that she did not bounce), brought her knees up, and rested her drink on them. "You said there was an 'unless'."

"Hm? Oh, that . . . I promised, did I, eh? Well then.

"*Twenty* years ago I was a bright young captain of the Royal Engineers, full of piss, vinegar, and fulminate of mercury.

"One pleasant autumn weekend I was detailed to a commando-training unit, to demonstrate explosives, sabotage, blowing up telephones at a distance, that sort of thing. One of our special bits of theatre was to booby-trap a vehicle—never anything lethal, you understand, just thunderflashes and smoke—put it in a motor pool and clock the trainees while they tried to search it out.

"On a clear Saturday morning we'd just got the show set up and

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I'd sent my ADC for the trainees, when this Scots Guards officer strolls in, says—well I remember—'It's all right, Corporal, don't send for my driver, I'm in one awful bleeding hurry'—"

Dr. Castelperugio's grin became a laugh. Some of her drink spilled in lazy drifting droplets.

"Oh yes, you've guessed, haven't you. He pops out to our rigged vehicle and engages the motor. The bonnet flies up, the canvas top falls down—Thunder! Flash!—and a smoke-pot in the undercarriage belches black.

"Out of this staggers our Guards officer, coal-black and smoldering as a burnt match, roaring that someone's going to hang by morning, and it's not going to be Danny Deever. Even then, I might have brassed it out, save for one thing."

"Which was?"

"The motor-pool corporal was laughing himself sick, but I was so at attention you could've run a flag up my spine. And the Guardsman knew at once I was guilty.

"Course, he couldn't really do much to me—not without making himself out an ass at the inquiry. Not even if he *was* the Prince of Wales, only eight years short of the throne of England."

Dr. Castelperugio's laughter took a while to subside. "I think you're the fellow I've been looking for."

"My dear woman—!"

"Ah, Isambard . . . is there anything shorter I can call you? I'm sure you've got a dry-tanks dread of 'Izzy'."

" 'George' would be satisfactory, Doctor."

"May the Scatterer of the Asteroids bless and keep you breathing, then, George. And call me Urania, or better yet Rani. George, I want you to build something for me. Will you?"

"Did you have a particular project in mind?"

"No. But something big. Flashy. Expensive, sure, why not? I wanted to be famous, George; but I'm not, and the only revenge I've got is that I'm rich."

Hembersmith-Byrne lifted his glass. "To revenge, madam."

"Suppose we took electron torches and carved a Belt rock into a Switch . . . five klicks across . . . plated it silver . . . "

"That hardly sounds like a suitable monument."

"And why not? I did it, didn't I? Hey, you know about the big interferometer the Russians built, half at each end of the Lagrange-skis? They call it the Moonstraddler. Suppose we put—"

"I could not . . . *really*, my dear, a ribald joke on a cosmic scale . . . "

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"Not ribald, dirty." She tilted her head. "Arthur Saint George . . . it must have really affected you. Or is everybody down there like that? I've never been to England, though I kind of like the Beatles." She stood and paced barefoot away from him. He thumbed his sideburns. "All right, what did you mention? Bridges . . . where? Tunnels . . . half the rockfolk live in tunnels. Iron's always to be had, but Scatterer knows what a *ship* made out of it would fly like. Railroad trains . . . " She looked up at the glass ceiling. A bright pinpoint shot past, a ship bound out from Mars. "You know, it just might work. There are trains on the Moon, sure. And it's about time somebody gave the jump-haulers something to think about.

"Oh Knight Sir Isambard St. George—would you build me a railroad?"

Hembersmith-Byrne's head came up so fast his seatbelt creaked as his body tried to follow. "A . . . railway, madam? Whence to where?"

"From Phobostown, of course. To . . . to . . . what's it matter, George? What about that fellow that took the message to Groucho or whoever? Did he ask where to?"

"My dear lady . . . a *railway* . . . My dear Urania . . . !" He reached inside his jacket, produced a pencil and a cigar. "May I?"

"Told you I've got plenty of air—but it's against the law."

"I see." He examined the small black cheroot. "No matter. It was my last one anyway." He clamped it unlit in his mouth and began to scribble on the griplon of the end table.

"To revenge, George?" she said softly.

"To sweet revenge . . . Rani."

"What exactly do you mean, steam power?"

"*Steam,*" Hembersmith-Byrne said, not irritably. "External combustion. Volatilized working fluid in a closed system driving a power linkage by the force of its expansion."

Jack Cool—of Cool, Snow, and Winter, Machinists and Engineers—scratched his head and looked round the cluttered office as if seeking aid, or an exit. But Snow was buried in a book, and Winter stared at computer screen, playing stress games with a wire-cage structure model.

Finally Cool said "Yeah, but the combustion chamber—"

"Pressurize it. Your gravity's so low we won't be able to trust thermal convection; we'll need jet forcing."

"Condensing the water out—"

"Did I mention water? Perhaps we'll use water; I'd like to. But

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ammonia's a possibility, or liquid metal, or bromine. And we'll build a chiller, of course, not merely a casual heat exchanger."

"*Bromine*—Look. Look, Mister Byrne—I mean Sir Hembersmith—I mean—*Why?*"

Hembersmith-Byrne dipped into his briefcase and pulled out a set of glossy prints. "Look at this. The *Pendennis Castle,* in Great Western Railway green and black. Think of her with those high spoked drivers flashing, the morning sun on her brasswork, racing for the main-line speed record of the world, over one hundred twenty kilometers per hour, while the passengers in the coaches behind sip morning tea and every schoolboy on the line is late to classes watching her pass and wishing he were on the footplate.

"Or this. A New York Central shrouded Hudson—looks like a great gray bullet on wheels, doesn't she? That was the *Castle*'s competition, carrying the *Twentieth Century Limited* from New York to Chicago in twenty-two hours—then twenty—then eighteen—and not just doing it smoothly; in her lounge a barber would shave you with a straight razor, naked Solingen steel pressed tight to your throat while the records fell.

"Or this. Great black demon, isn't she, with that piping and those pumps and all the flailing monkey motion of her siderods. She's a Northern Pacific Z-8 articulated, built to snake round the curves, can you imagine that? With two full sets of driving wheels, twenty wheels in all, on silk runs from the port of Seattle or timber hauls from the American Northwest, three hundred tons plus of boiling live iron flattening mountains beneath her.

"And sir, you ask me why."

There was sweat on Cool's face, and his teeth were on his lower lip. "Colin, Mary," he said, "come here and see what this fellow's got."

Sir Isambard thumbed his sideburns and drew out a set of plans.

"I shall require one hundred thousand meters of girder rail, to this cross-section," said Sir Isambard, "and another one hundred kilometers of channel rail, thus. The tolerances are given; the critical tolerances are given in red."

Willis Duquesne looked through half-circular glasses at the drawings. "It would appear, sir, that you plan to build a railroad."

"Very perceptive of you, sir."

"Yes, well . . . it was done on the Moon, of course; the Chinese did it, to carry ore and Lunar wheat . . . bright red spokes on their locomotive drive wheels, just like their old ones. And do you know

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what people called that, eh, Mr. Hembersmith-Byrne? They called it 'quaint'. As if . . . the firm of Duquesne and Sons contracted for the rail on that project, you know, Sir Isambard."

"I had heard, sir."

"Yes, well, I shouldn't wonder . . . when the grain cars began to roll, that showed them 'quaint', didn't it?

"Now, Sir Isambard, I wonder if you've considered the adhesion problem. On the Moon we used a rack-rail with great success. I believe the program tapes for the milling are still on file. And as for those guidance channels, have you thought of a variable-pitch engagement, serving both as momentum compensation and . . . "

"Bridge *what?"*

"Angelina Stickney Crater. I do believe you've heard of it."

Rollo Magill rolled his eyes, wiped his bald bullet head. "Aye, I've heard of it, bless you, sir, I've even seen it; 'tis the biggest hole on Phobos the rockfolk didn't dig.

"And now haven't I heard of you, your Lordship? Aren't you the felly who brass-plated all o'—nah, 'twas too long ago.

"Assuming that this is what you want to do, and this is the hole you want to do it over, what in the name o' the Scatterer's Hangman do you want to do it *for?"*

"It is necessary," said Sir Isambard, topping off both their glasses of synthetic Tullamore Dew, "that a railway line reach out to those it would serve, though that mean overcoming natural obstacles in its path. Put simply, Stickney Crater is in the way I wish to go."

Magill put down his empty glass. "A fine speech, sir, but I'm not certain I caught an important point. Would you repeat the part about what's to be servin' who?"

Sir Isambard unsheathed his plans and spread them on the table. While Magill eyed them over, Hembersmith-Byrne excused himself and went to the bar. He pointed at one of the brass lanterns that decorated ClaustroPhobia's walls. "Would you happen to know, my good fellow," he asked the bartender, "who fashioned these lamps?"

It seemed he did. Sir Isambard noted the name and address, collected another bottle of Dew, and returned to the table.

Rollo Magill's face was illuminated. "Bless me, sir, I most humbly beg your pardon, for ever thinkin' a man'd profane the good name of Isambard Himself. It's a suspension bridge you'll be wanting now, isn't it, your Lordship?"

"Nothing less, Mister Magill, nothing less," said Hembersmith-Byrne, and the nectar then did flow.

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Dr. Castelperugio's very large quarters no longer seemed very large at all. There were plotter elevations and pastel renderings on the walls, bits of brass and chips of enamel on the tables, meter lengths of alloy channel and rail and rack on the floor. A model of a Stirling-cycle engine was disassembled and dispersed among three rooms. A plastic fluidics setup was in the bathroom, velvets and laces in the bedroom, a fullscale mockup of a very peculiar piston-and-wheel arrangement in the living room, and a white paper package of Scatterer-knew-what in the kitchen freezer.

Urania came in, kicked off her shoes and caught them on the slow fall, skirted a crate labeled dn ǝdıs sıhʇ, and nearly fell over Hembersmith-Byrne, who was seated on the floor watching Mars through the clear ceiling.

Her toes gripped the shag. She looked down at him. He looked up, but not at her. She said, "Penny for your thoughts."

"My dear woman, that's consultation, and the fee is five decagrammes gold per day. And up."

"You're getting to be insufferable. But then, I guess you've earned the right."

"Madam, at one time it was virtually a British national imperative to be insufferable. But whatever have I done to earn the *right?*"

"Haven't you noticed? Haven't you seen what's happened on this rock since you started?"

"*You* started—" and he was still.

"This was supposed to be the high frontier. Action and adventure. Hah! The rock-blockers fanned out one way, the soil-sifters another, the scientists packed up for Lagrangeski, the community farmers for the Moon, and all the big-time hustlers found it richer on Mars. So what's left here? Some saloonkeepers, their most earnest patrons, and a lot of little entrepreneurs with nothing better to do than play chess with their computers. Even the Pits of Gehenna had gotten boring.

"And now they're building, and thinking, and *doing*—"

"Was it really as bad as all that?" Hembersmith-Byrne said, his eyes curiously soft. He was thinking, certainly, and certainly would not sell his thoughts; they might have been of another, larger planet that had lost its frontier folk and its frontiers.

"George, nobody's beaten a computer at chess in eighty years."

Hembersmith-Byrne got to his feet, with a waver but without a bounce, brushed his whiskers and cleared his throat for action. After a measured pause, at the dramatically correct moment, the comboard in the corner chimed two-three, two-three.

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Urania said "That's just . . . that's not my signal."

"Quite. It's for the Company. One moment." Sir Isambard stepped carefully to the comboard, reached out and flipped a paddle switch. The calltone died, and an amber light came on. There was a faint sound of machinery.

"Pardon me for asking, but what's the use of setting up a call number if you're not going to answer it?"

"My dear Doctor, if the good Lord had meant telephones to be answered, he never would have created the recording device."

Dr. Castelperugio laughed, very sweetly. "Your good Lord must know the Scatterer of the Asteroids."

"I daresay he does, Rani."

When finally played, the tape said:

". . . we're not real sure what you've got in mind, but if it's a joke it ain't funny and if it's some kind of scheme by the big mining consortiums to put small haulers down it ain't gonna work.

"Now you ain't laid one meter of track yet, so we're gonna give you the benefit of the doubt and figure it's a joke. Scat'rer knows there ain't much to do for laughs around here. 'Course if you really are schemin', we'll just have to get our laughs somehow else.

"Be hearin' from you, Casey Jones."

Dr. Castelperugio frowned at the machine. "All they needed was to sign it 'A Friend'."

Sir Isambard stroked his mustache with deep seriousness. Then he turned away and began stuffing a carryall with tools and the rail samples; he zipped the nonpressure seal. He took a suitcase from the closet and headed for the door. He appeared oppressively loaded, but of course the bags only steadied his walk.

"Where in Solar hell are you going?"

"To lay a metre of track, of course." The door slid open. He walked out; she followed.

"Now wait a minute. You're not—"

"Certainly I am. I may be a Knight of the Realm, but I've been a navvy in my time. Now I'm going to be a platelayer. No—better—that American word: a gandy dancer. Love that word."

"What about that call?"

"Why, my dear, it wouldn't be a construction project of any merit whatsoever without a threat of violence levied upon it. I must say, I'm delighted they were so prompt. And so . . . classic in form.

"You shouldn't run out there without your shoes, m'dear."

She was indeed nearly airborne. She grabbed a wall rail. "All

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right. But you wait for me. At Lock Eighteen. I won't be long."

He bowed from the shoulders and watched for a moment as she went hand-over-hand along the rail. Then he started off, singing in his neat-whisky tenor:

"Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules;
Of Hector and Lysander, and such great names as these;
But of all the world's great he-e-roes,
there's none that can compare
With a tow-row-row-row, row-row-row,
To the British Grenadier!"

When Urania reached the lock concourse, she had to clear the way through a crowd of some sixty rockfolk, all gawking and puzzled and excited. Not that she had any trouble getting through: not with a Remington Recoilless M6050 in her hands and two boxes of shells jammed into her softsuit pockets.

"I do say," said Hembersmith-Byrne, "you're a more civilized lot up here than I'd expected. Fancy shooting clay birds up here; and they'd be in low orbit, too, wouldn't they."

"Look—oh, what's the use? I'm going with you, no matter what you say."

"Why, thank you," he said quietly, in a voice she had not heard him use before.

They punched the airclock—party of two, 3-hour supply with 15-minute reserve—and the lock cycled them out.

The weight of lifepacks made it possible to walk nearly normally on the Phobic surface—at least without phobic terror of launching oneself into black heaven. The suits' gear included fifty-meter and five-meter retractile cables with snap-link ends, and there were anchoring eyes and sliderails all over the surface around Phobos-town. One anchored one's fifty, walked till it paid out, snapped the five, and remotely released the long rope.

An interesting feature of the fifty-cable's shackle was that it could only be released from its belt reel. All kinds of people walk about fifty meters behind one. It was also not coincidental that the long rope was as long as effective pistol range. Life in the rocks did go on from day to day, though sometimes one wondered how.

Urania and Sir Isambard reached a spot where an open strip stretched to both close horizons. It lay between two ship pads, was fairly clear of surface conduits, and was overlooked by a number of large windows—not to mention half a dozen ships clamped down on

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the pads.

Sir Isambard consulted a small plastic map from his pocket. "This will do, I believe. What's a good channel for general hailing? Don't want to clutter an emergency band, of course."

From Urania's look, though it was vague through her helmet, she was beginning to understand the method behind the madness. "Channel A-Blue. Stay off the Reds."

Hembersmith-Byrne pushed buttons. "General call, general call, to all on this channel. In compliance with the Common Market Public Constructions Code, revision of 2024, public electronic-medium announcement is hereby being made to all tuned citizens of Phobostown that earth is being broken by the Great CircumPhobic Railway Construction Company, a publicly held firm."

"What do you mean, publicly held? Company?"

"Be patient."

"Is that a real law?"

"It was. Do you have any flares for that lovely gun?"

"Not with me."

"Pity. Oh—an automatic loader. Not so lovely as I'd thought. Wonder if Purdey've ever made a vacuum weapon?" He unzipped the carryall and took out bolts, rails, a Black & Decker anchoring gun. He loaded a clip of shells in the tool, inserted a rock anchor and pressed the point against the ground. He flipped the safety and fired, silently.

"Shall we hook up?" he said, snapped the shackle of his short rope to the anchor eye, released and reeled in the long one, then did the same with Urania's.

As he bolted down the rack-rail, there were a few faces silhouetted in windows, a few figures watching from the pads. When the staggered footing blocks went down, there were more. Then zig-zagging tie rods went from block to block, slipping under the rack, structural 'poxy fusing them in place. The running rails were laid upon the blocks and wedged in place— "chaired," Sir Isambard insisted. More rods went into the blocks, these pointing up and outward from the rail center. And on their ends were fastened lengths of channel, its open side toward the center of the construction. The whole thing looked rather like a stretch of gangway with canted handrails—a meter and a half wide, over two at the channel rails, and only one long, of course, and with that curious corrugated rack down its middle.

Another resemblance came immediately to mind. When Hembersmith-Byrne put his tool down and stood on the track, gripping

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the channel firmly in one hand, it was strikingly like a pulpit.

"People of Phobostown!" he began, in a voice that might have carried without radio. "Either you are closing your eyes to a situation you do not wish to acknowledge—or you are unaware of the caliber of disaster indicated by the absence of a railway line connecting your community with the distant and uncivilized—yes, I may well say *dark*—reaches of your fair and radiant world."

Dr. Castelperugio's eyes were as big as Mars above. Phobos was one of the darkest objects in the Solar System, dark all over; but perhaps that was beside the point.

"Think of it—no crushing liftoff, no brain-swelling landing—Phobic gravity preserved on all points of the line—restaurant *and tavern* coaches—at every moment, one may look out a window and see the soil beneath—"

Hembersmith-Byrne had noticed how often the rockfolk looked downward, to confirm the presence of ground below. Though part of it was surely to avoid walking by some skystone gold, even a dropped five-gram piece.

"And now the first step of this mighty journey has been taken. Only a baby step, indeed, but a precursor of seven-league strides to come.

"Well, fine, you say; you will watch. And wait. And see. Fine indeed. So that the future will not be unduly complicated, we hope that most of you choose to observe passively. For the Great CircumPhobic Railway must strictly limit the openings it makes available. Only a few will be able to lay track, and proudly say 'I built the G.C.R. with my own hands.' Only a rare few will be able to purchase shares in the Company—an option of, shall I say, *unimagined* possibilities?"

When at some length he finished, he turned to find her gone.

He found her in her rooms, the instant he entered; she was sitting belted into a chair with four empty glasses scattered about and the Remington pointed square and steady at him.

"So you're a grifter. A con man. And I staked your play. Damn you to Solar hell and gone, Hember-whoever-you-are. Scatterer drop you the long way hard—swing on the Hangman's long rope—"

Hembersmith-Byrne released carryall and suit-case; they landed a second later with soft plops. "Madam, I—"

"Don't 'madam' me, you air thief! . . . A madam isn't supposed to pay for the privilege."

"I—ah, hm, ah—believe I know what precipitated this. The shares,

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mad—Rani—ah'm, *Doctor*—it was never my intention to turn a profit on them. They will in fact be priced below an income level. I merely wanted to deter suspicions that we were a secret project of the large Belt consortiums."

The gun muzzle wavered. "That's . . . reasonable. But you're smooth enough to come up with it that quick . . . or have had it ready."

Hembersmith-Byrne scratched his whiskers.

"And stop that, too—you'll pull the spirit gum loose."

Sir Isambard's jaw fell. "My dear woman . . . that is . . . I must protest. Impugn my honor, cast doubts upon the integrity of what I build—but *never,* madam, insult an Englishman's whiskers.

"I must, I fear, terminate our relationship with the sincerest regrets. I regret the day, Doctor, that I alit upon your table." He swung round on a toe.

"*Wait.*" He turned halfway back and stood at parade rest. Her face was twisted up. "The day you—" Her mouth curled. "When you—" The corners of her eyes crinkled. "—landed on the—" Her cheekbones came into sharp relief and the gun wobbled alarmingly. "—on the *table*—" The laugh started as a shriek and lost control after that. She doubled up, bumped the Remington and tossed it aside, pointing at it and laughing as it drifted away and settled in the carpet pile.

"Oh, ho, I . . . I'm sorree, hee, hee, but I . . . on the table, I mean, oh, George, I don't care how smooth you are, you couldn't have concocted something like that . . . and if you *did,* I can't let it have been for nothing."

Hembersmith-Byrne's eyebrows were almost touching, and the furrow in his brow could have swallowed Phobos. Well, Deimos, anyway.

"My mechanics professor told me I would have days like this," he said. "But he rather implied that they would come *after* the project was built."

A track crew of sixty laid down one hundred eighty meters of track an hour, nearly one and one-half kilometers a day. Hembersmith-Byrne rolled from the termiunus at Phobostown (which bore a neatly handlettered sign reading **PADDINGTON**) to End of Track on a little railcar with a solar umbrella. He used a Mazda rockroller to get out to Stickney Crater, almost on the other side of the world, where Rollo Magill was building a five-thousand-meter suspension bridge and rupturing an average of two radio membranes a week

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yelling orders.

Sir Isambard drove the roller up on an outcrop and looked on the surface of Phobos. He couldn't see the crews; the surface curvature was too sharp. He couldn't hear the noises of work; there was no air to carry them, and his radio was on standby.

He felt the sharp poke in his back, however. A helmet clacked against his, and a doubly unrecognizable voice said "Wouldja come widdus, please?"

He turned—slowly—to see the small cargo boat that had landed barely thirty meters behind him. The two men who had emerged wore reflective visors, had no namestrips on their suits. Someone had neatly taped over the trademark on the ship. It was, he noted, a Chrystar Uni, and the gentlemen's back-pokers were Smith and Wesson Spacer-Sixes.

"Well," said Sir Isambard, "since you said 'please'," and went for a ride.

Hembersmith-Byrne was thus introduced to a powerfully built but not large man. Ship-shovers got paid to move mass; they couldn't afford too much of it in the non-revenue areas (like the cranium, some people said, in their absence). The man's hairline started on the top of his head, and his beard was so full Sir Isambard wondered about his helmet. He had on an innershirt (hair at the collar and down his arms) and softsuit trousers. His name, Sir Isambard knew, was D.D. Dolan, and the name under the tape had been 3-D Haulage. He told this to Dolan, which did not much seem to please him.

"You maybe know too much," Dolan said.

"Not at all," said Sir Isambard, "since your intended opening line was 'Now if you play along, you can'—no, make that 'youse can walk right outta here. But if not, it's—it's—' I'm sorry, old man, but I don't know the local equivalent of 'cement overshoes'."

"The long retrofire," Dolan said, then shook his head violently. "Now wait. If you . . . *What's that?*"

Sir Isambard withdrew his hand from his unsealed suit. "It's a cigar, old man. I know I can't light it, but you surely won't mind if I chew it a bit. Since I'm due anyway for . . . 'the long retrofire.' Yes, I like that. Stolen, of course, but then so much slang is."

Dolan looked at the cigar, at its chewer, at the cigar again. "About this stock business. We want to know the solid stone. This Urania"—he said You-rainy-ah—"Castelperson—how many proxies is she voting, and who's she voting 'em for? Ap Rhys? Cawelti? Or is this the Old Thing tryin' to get off Earth? If it is, you can tell those well-dwellers they ain't gonna do it."

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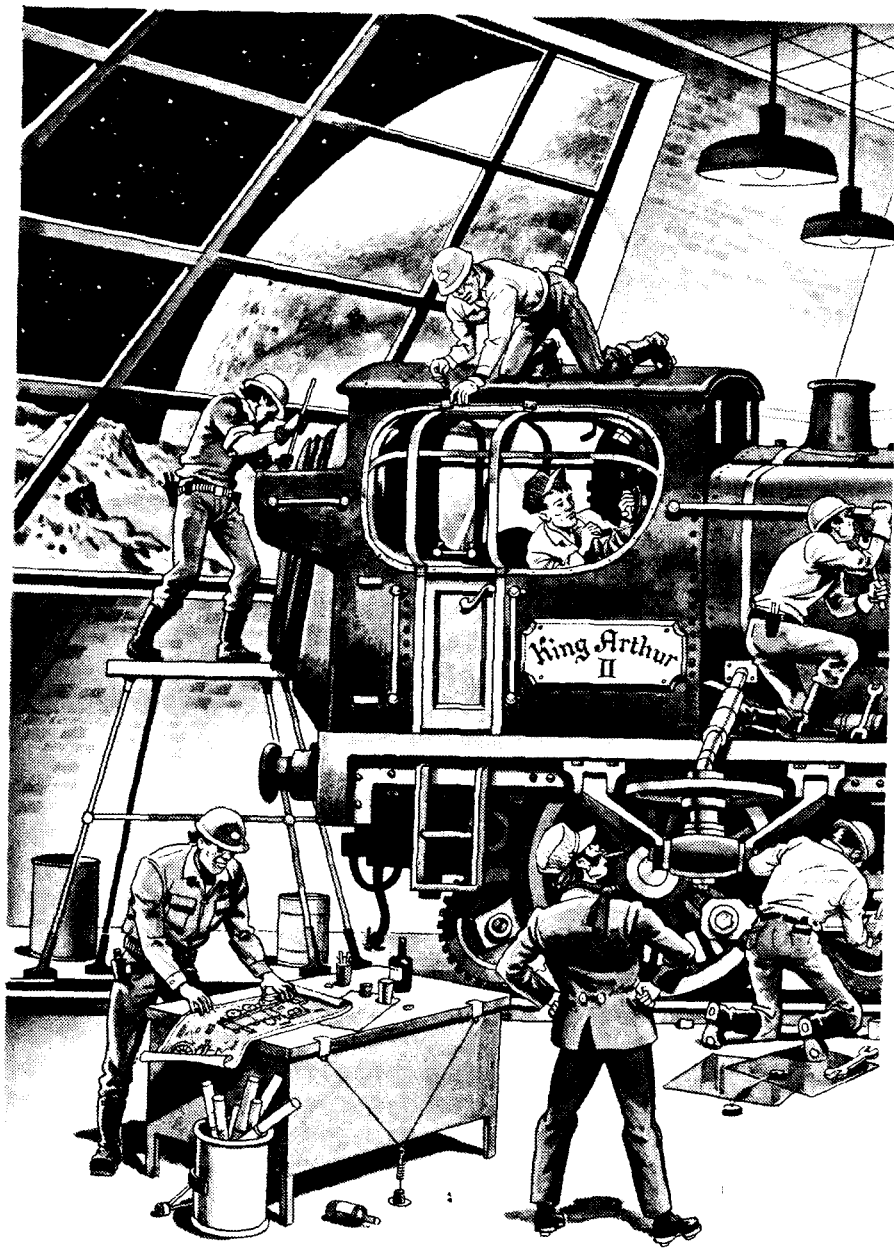

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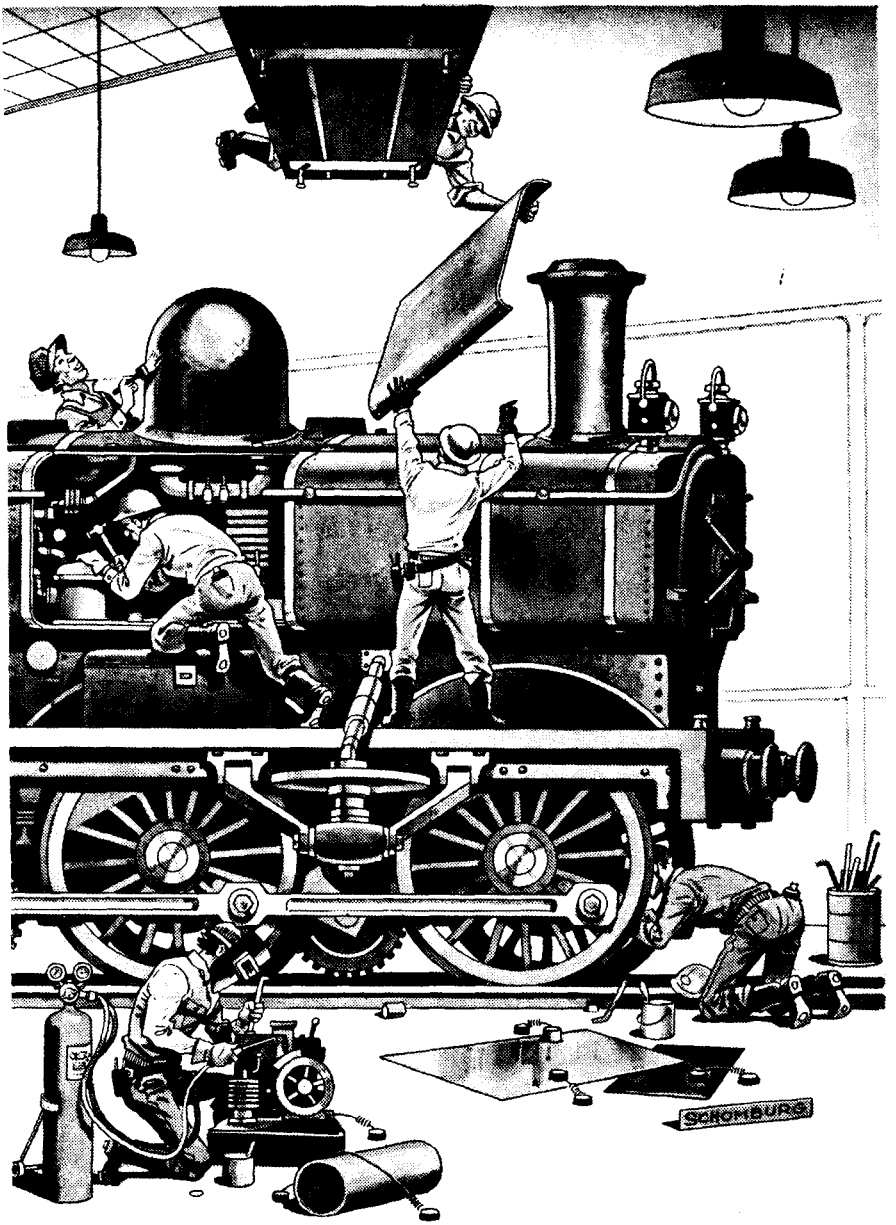

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"Splendid sentiment! Here, have a—oh, blast, this is my last. Dreadfully sorry, old man."

Dolan drew his hand back, slowly.

"But if you'll examine the prospectus, my good chap, you'll see that each investor is confined to one share of voting common stock."

"But you're selling for a decagram gold—and I hear this Castelperson's got—say, who is she, anyway?"

Hembersmith-Byrne explained.

"Sheeee . . . " said Dolan.

"Dr. Castelperugio owns one share of voting common, as per the corporate charter, and an—ahm, considerable block—of non-voting preferred.

"I don't suppose, Mr. Dolan, that I could interest you in a share? After all, considering the position of your competitor Mr. McCool . . . "

"Finn's got . . . ! He never told me."

"Well, if you don't mind my saying so, Mr. Dolan, you do have a somewhat naturally suspicious nature."

There was a pause. Sir Isambard watched Dolan. Dolan watched the cigar.

"Finn . . . and if *Finn,* then who else . . . then it's up the rope I go, up I go, for sure.

"Well, well, gravity well. I guess I owe Dr. Urania—" (pronounced correctly) "—something. I guess we all do, eh, Sir Izzy?"

"Bang on," said Hembersmith-Byrne, and laughed through clenched teeth.

"Can't believe it," said Dolan, as they set Sir Isambard down at his rockroller, a decagram gold richer and a cigar poorer. "About Finn, I mean. Just can't . . . "

"I believe it firmly," said Sir Isambard, who then switched his radio off, turned, and added, "after he sees *your* name, at any rate."

When he got back to Phobostown, he was pleased to note the arrival of fifty fresh cigars, individually vacuum-packed.

> "O harp whose cermet strings catch morning sun,
> Whose piercéd towers stand monolithic black. . . . "

"How much longer, George?"

"It's a sonnet, Rani; only twelve more lines."

"It's really awful, you know."

"Yes, well, that's all part of engineering, you see; boring climactic ceremonies featuring wretched poems written for the occasion. They

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hated it when Lackland brought Isembert over, and when Victoria I was Queen and the Little Giant and his Pa were building, and when they opened my Channel Tunnel they had some hypermodern poet who was not only innocent of rhyme and meter but worked in French, for God's sake."

"Who is that reading, anyway?"

"Colin Snow, with the firm who did up the locomotive. He tells me that as a result of this project he's going to marry his business partner."

"Jack Cool?"

"No, it's worse than that. Mary Winter. God save 'em both—Colin Winter-Snow and Mary Snow-Winter—she'd been better off Mary Christmas, poor dear. Ah well, I s'pose with the other one Cool, there's no way it could've turned out well."

"Better than Hembersmith-Byrne-Castelperugio."

"Well, yes, I should say," he said, using that odd quiet voice for only the second time.

And after all that preliminary, it took hours to drive the Golden Spike, down at the foot of the bridge, because each of the ceremonial spike-drivers had to be cabled down tight with special short lines to avoid Newtonian incidents. And despite the oaths Rollo Magill had sworn about his shiny glass-boron span, and the strain cells installed to back the oaths up, with every stroke of the skystone-silver sledge on the skystone-gold spike people announced that the bridge (which *was* pretty thin, come to look at it) was warping. Finally Magill proclaimed that it was not his bridge that was skewed, but several heads, and he offered to straighten them personally.

(One hour after the spike was finally driven home, it was removed, since some rockfolk did not much care how they got their skystone metal. Power tools were used.)

Then the bar began corrupting ethanol, and a good time was finally had by all.

Paddington Station, Phobostown, was now a fine white geodesic framed in gilt. The handmade station sign had been replaced by one of enameled iron; it was accompanied by a considerable number of others—**BEWARE OF THE TRAINS, LICENCED RAILWAY EXPRESS OFFICE, DO NOT ENTER UPON OR CROSS THE TRACKS, AGENT'S OFFICE (The agent is On Duty), LAVATORY,** and the one that now drew every eye, **TO TRAINS.**

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Every eye in Phobostown, and a good many pairs of millions more. The press services of Earth were there, grumbling about the expense; journalists from the Lagranges, commenting somewhat wistfully on the history of railroading in Russia and its spread to the West; from the Moon, whose commentator kept being photographed holding a measuring stick in front of things; from Mars, who repeated the comment that "Mars is as pleased as any parent of the accomplishments of her children" until an unfortunate incident damaged the tape and the reporter. Rumor had it that D.D. Dolan had witnessed the incident, but rumor obeys the dramatic unities more than life.

Every eye in Phobostown: through visors, windows, via video link if necessary, and the crowds made it necessary. Those inside waved little flags at their windows: green, with a red circle ringed by a golden band. Those outside held flags wired to ripple in the nonexistent breeze. Anchoring eyelets in large numbers had been planted for the occasion, and to pass through the crowd was like walking through a nylon spiderweb.

Then appeared a cluster of figures at Lock Eighteen: Hembersmith-Byrne, wearing a billed cap atop his helmet; Dr. Castelperugio, carrying a bottle of Chateau Schiaparelli '59; Rollo Magill, holding a small silver shovel.

There was a buzz on their radios, and somewhere a band broadcast "Our World Is Linked from Shore to Shore," lyrics by Colin Winter-Snow. The music, by way of balance, was the recording of "Garryowen" from the ClaustroPhobia tavern. The three immediately went to telephone cable.

"There used to be a terribly cruel and stupid joke about it," said Hembersmith-Byrne, "but you know, I think that man's wife *must* be deaf."

They did not have to part the crowds at gunpoint this time. A raised platform connected the lock with the station. Small signs along its sides read **A PRESSURIZED CONCOURSE TO BE CONSTRUCTED ON THIS SITE BY R. MAGILL (Builder of the Angelina Stickney Memorial Suspension Bridge).**

Urania and Sir Isambard turned to Magill. "Well now, you of all men can't fault a felly for bein' enterprisin', can you, your Lordship?"

They paused before a high, long, white barrier. Sir Isambard raised a hand, dropped it. The barriers fell away. Spotlights came on.

The locomotive was lime-green and dark red, with brass bands about its boiler. The marker lamps were in neat green housings, the

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complex tangle of interlocking siderods were bright as streaks of lightning, the wheels had narrow white rims and were spoked blood-red.

It had five rows of wheels. Two sets were mounted horizontally, like short scalloped airfoils, fitting into the elevated channel rails. They were supported by hydraulic knuckles, Mary Snow-Winter's design to Willis Duquesne's concept, which would tilt upward and downward to balance the vertical stresses on the engine. Two rows of wheels rested on the running rails, in proper locomotive fashion. And, almost invisible, three great cogs beneath the engine engaged the center rack-rail, to provide positive forward traction despite the low gravity.

The engineer's cab (Sir Isambard had regretfully abandoned calling it the "footplate," but he firmly resisted "cockpit") was glassed in, with wide-vision bay windows on either side. Side clearances ("loading-gauge," Sir Isambard insisted) were hardly a problem. It was connected by pressure-tight fabric vestibules to the three coaches behind.

The coaches were painted dark red, with somewhat less ornamental brasswork than the locomotive had borne. Above each window was an arch of stained glass, the ringed-globe emblem cunningly worked in, and through each window could be glimpsed brocade and plush. At the train's very end was a platform with a gleaming brass rail, a transparent bubble giving it the illusion of openness. Flanking the platform were a pair of familiar-looking brass lanterns.

"Chap had so much else to do," said Hembersmith-Byrne, "I just rented them off the tavern wall till he can get round to it."

The platform was extended. Dr. Castelperugio raised the bottle of cryptochampagne. "I christen thee . . . King Arthur the Second!" The bottle crashed. Fluid boiled and froze in a green-gold cloud. Sir Isambard rubbed some splashed brass with his glove. "Good lad, he was," he said by telephone. "Last King to admit he'd wanted to be an engine driver early on."

They entered through a soft-side lock at the rear of the train. Within were simulated Pintsch gas lamps with crystal shades, velvet seats around tables covered with griplon painted to imitate inlay (each with its own silver pendulum to indicate true local down when pouring drinks) a fully equipped bar with all the amenities plus one: cut-glass decanters of authentic non-synthesized booze.

The next car forward was the diner. A setting for twenty-two was laid out, each implement, dish, glass tucked in its own hold-down. A name card and menu was at each seat; the main course this

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evening was mountain trout baked in rock salt (that mysterious frozen bundle from Urania's kitchen.)

The lavatories were at the end of the car. Signs within read **These Toilets Are Recyclic. However, to Preserve an Historic Tradition, KINDLY DO NOT FLUSH WHILE THE TRAIN IS STANDING IN THE STATION.**

Next was the baggage and life-support car. Mostly bare, there were some pieces of cargo-handling equipment within, cubical heavy-duty recyclers, mail pigeonholes behind a brass rail. And in one corner was a small glassed-off, curtained area, with a large-bore pipe to one of the recyclers. It too had a sign, one that D.D. Dolan had called "the most ellaquent thing I ever read." It said simply **SMOKING AREA.**

The last vestibule led to the cab. It was outfitted with lace curtains on the windows, red velvet cushions for engineer and fireman, levers and pipes and brass-fitted gauges. The speed indicator was divided halfway up its scale by a red line and the neat legend **ESCAPE VELOCITY**. It was informational only, of course—the Snow-Winter-Duquesne channel rails would keep the train on the track at any speed. On the wall hung Urania's Remington Recoilless, above a plaque reading **FOR BUFFALO OR ROAD AGENTS**.

Magill propped his shovel against the firebox doors. Both were artistic only: behind the doors was a pressure-sealed system of methane heaters, ammonia piping, turbines, and chillers—altogether the most complicated power system short of fusion ever used off the Earth. But it did cause vaporized fluid to drive pistons and valve gear. *King Arthur II* was a steam locomotive. Mounted on the firebox was a vacuum-crystallized ten-carat diamond, in token of that other allotrope of carbon.

Urania popped the cover of a great round watch, pressed the stem and read the digits. "Boarding in two minutes," she said. Then she put a hand on Sir Isambard's elbow. "Hey, you know . . . it's been fantastic."

He showed no sign of having heard or felt. She left the cab.

Sir Isambard stayed still for a moment more. Then he turned to Magill. "Let's get steam up, then, shall we?"

The burners lit perfectly. The ammonia began to stir. Gauge needles climbed their scales. Hembersmith-Byrne pulled a cord and a perfect electronic synthesis of a seven-chime steam whistle sounded in their helmets.

"Start pressurizing the cars," Sir Isambard said—and now it was Magill's turn not to respond.

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"What's out there?"

"A felly I used to know, and wish I didn't. You can finish starting her without me, can't you?"

"Well, certainly, but—"

"You do it, then. And if I'm not back on time, start off."

"Will you tell me what the matter is?"

"No, 'cause I don't fair know." And he was gone.

Hembersmith-Byrne paused, scratching, then went back to work.

Rollo Magill followed a man with a trace of a limp, one arm held close to his side, and a bulging suit pocket; and he was careful not to be seen following.

A little past the end of the train, the man loitered in the shadow of a rock; and he was being careful not to be seen loitering. He clearly knew something about sneaking round rocks, but his style was stale enough to let Magill clack helmets with him.

"Peter, me lad, it's been a long time," Magill said.

"Hoozat—Rollo? Uh—yeah. Long time."

"Not long enough by half, I'm thinking. I told you, Peter Gurney, what would happen if I ever saw you on the Great Terror again, didn't I?"

"Maybe."

"I said the Scatterer's Hangman would take you, and you'd swing on his long rope."

"Like I said, maybe," Gurney said. "You don't got me scared, Rollo. You know what I got here? Enough firepower to splinter you. And you don't got any. You're too clean for that now, right? All honest. Well, let me tell you something, Rollo. Mister ap Rhys remembers when you weren't so honest. So why don't'cha forget you ever saw me."

"Oh, ho, so it's Mister ap Rhys, is it. Well, I shan't forget any of that, Peter Gurney. I'll go, but I shan't forget. And don't you be forgetting what I told you, either."

"Yeah, sure. So long, Rollo. See you at the wake." He moved away quickly, bent arm taut. As he did, Magill reached out to Gurney's belt and grasped the shackle of Gurney's fifty-meter cable.

Magill walked to the side, allowing the line to pay out very gently. He reached the rail line, some meters behind the crowds, and snapped the shackle onto a channel-rail support.

"Well, now, will you look at that," he said, drumming fingers on his helmet. "Such carelessness." He rattled the shackle. "And nothing whatever to be done about it. Alas, Peter Gurney, didn't I warn you?"

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The train pulled out with a gentle jar, which did not at all affect the passengers' sip-capped drinks. The silver gravity pendulums swung back. Dr. Castelperugio accepted a tall shot of Jack Daniel's from the bartender and leaned against the wall, a thumb in the watchpocket of her gold-buttoned black silk vest.

There was a sharp gust of wind as a man in a softsuit, with a plastic armor vest, pulled himself through the rear lock. He had a riot pistol with an enormous barrel in one hand; and his other hand was raised, palm outward, in the universal gesture of trust and good will.

"You people just finish your drinks," he said. "Matter of fact, bartender, you can pour me a double of that good stuff."

"Who in Solar hell are you?"

"You're Dolan, aren't'cha? Well, shut up, Mister Dolan. I work for—" He giggled. "—*represent* Mister Hugh ap Rhys."

Dolan glared at the intruder, then at Urania. Urania glared back.

"This is really a fine way to travel," the man with the gun said. "Mister ap Rhys was real interested."

"He's a stockholder," Urania said dryly.

"Yeah. Well, you know, Mister ap Rhys keeps his eye on you private haulers. He's watchin'. Only some of you don't seem to believe that he's watchin'. So he set up this little demonstration.

"Round on the other side of this crummy rock there's a ship waitin'. And we're all gonna stop and get off, and you're gonna walk home. And just to make sure you don't forget the walk, we'll bust you all off a piece of this thing to carry back as a memento.

"Now, where's my drink?"

Dr. Castelperugio yelled, "Right here!" and threw her glass. The thug brought up his gun. He could not have missed at that range.

But he did, because as the glass struck him he doubled over and shot backward through the lock curtains. His gun, jerked from his glove, hung in midair for an instant, then fell to the floor.

"Lady," said D.D. Dolan with pure awe, "I'm glad I'm on *your* side."

"He said there was a ship?" said Sir Isambard.

"Somewhere on the far side."

"Can't be too close to the bridge; there'll be too many people. And if we're late getting to the bridge, it'll be noticed. So they must be planning on about halfway beyond." Sir Isambard scanned the sky. "Well, there's nothing for it but to wait. Go on back and have dinner. If anything turns up, I'll ring you."

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Dinner was served, and eaten, at a steady 25 KPH, uneventfully except for the interminable toasts everyone felt obliged to make. At least Colin Winter-Snow was on his honeymoon.

They slowed a bit to cross Stickney Bridge, whose filaments shone in the sun; the void beneath was rough and dark and magnificent, flickering with hundreds of photostrobes. It inspired another round of toasts.

Dessert, berries imprisoned in a heavy sauce, went down smoothly, assisted by more Chateau Schiaparelli.

"And now," Dolan said, "I'd like to be the first to try out—"

Urania caught the intercom on the first ring.

"I see them," Hembersmith-Byrne said. "Bloody fools parked straddling the tracks."

"Are you going to stop?"

"My dear, I *can't* stop. People never have realized how much distance it takes to stop a train."

"They'll be expecting you to stop."

"That's their problem, I'm afraid. You might sit down, in case they're *quite* slow."

She sat. Less than a minute later, a shape that might have been the foot of a lander flicked past the windows. Everyone else seemed fortunately to be concentrating on berries, champagne, or cigars.

The intercom buzzed again.

"Almost too slow," Sir Isambard said. "They know something's wrong, but they're not certain what; they're following us. Bless these peripheral windows."

Someone came back from the observation car, pointing to the rear. "Hey, are they taping this? There's a chase boat just—"

There was a crash, a boom, a whoosh aft, and the unmistakable *zzzip* of an automatic pressure curtain dropping into place.

There was a sharp sound on the car roof. Outside, puffs of dust rose.

"They're shooting!"

"Indeed," Sir Isambard said. "Rani, make sure that everyone in the cars is sitting and belted in. *Not* specially braced—we don't want anyone trapped when—" There was a rush and a pop.

"*George?*"

A moment later Hembersmith-Byrne's voice returned, filtered by a suit telephone. "I'm fine. Blighters broke one of my windows. Now you do as I said—the glass back there is triple-pane, I don't think there's much danger. They're not shooting to kill."

"They got the observation bubble."

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"Ah! Well, they'll pay—indeed, they'll pay. Now, whatever you do, don't come up to the cab. Do you understand?"

"You might as well have invited me. But . . . yes."

"Wonderful woman. I've some things to attend to; don't expect to hear from me again. Ta."

"What? George? What did you mean—"

But the line was dead.

Hembersmith-Byrne cracked the throttle wider. The speedometer needle was sitting almost exactly on the **ESCAPE VELOCITY** line. Thanks to the pursuers, he could no longer hear his engine, but he could feel her, thrumming through the footplate. He looked sidelong out the intact window at the ship, which still fired occasionally. "Will you walk a little faster?" he sang to himself, and went back to his work.

Abruptly a semaphore signal appeared, flailing on the horizon. Only a thousand meters to Phobostown.

Sir Isambard went to the vestibule, opened the near end. He lifted the floor flap, exposing a zipper; opened it. Track and Phobos rock flashed past. In between was a tight-lock coupler, with a small handle striped in red and sealed with soft metal. He broke the seal, hooked the shackle of his short rope to the handle, and pulled an eyelet cord on the vestibule wall. The fabric parted. Only the coupler held the cars together now.

Eight hundred meters. The station, its lights, its people, were visible. Sir Isambard sounded the RF whistle, many short blasts, hoping someone still understood what that meant: *clear the tracks.*

There was only one problem remaining. Himself. He thought quite seriously about Casey Jones: "Jump, Sim, and save yourself!" Not him, at this speed, in a pressure suit.

His look fell on the Remington, and he smiled.

The station throng was absolutely wild as the train pulled in; their flags waved, bands played over interior air and exterior radio, a huge banner proclaimed **THE WORLD IS ONE.** As one organism they waited for their new brazen chariot to slow, stop, be welcomed; and depart with its second load of passengers.

It didn't stop. It didn't even slow. It barrelled through the station at sixty clicks an hour, a speed unheard of for ground vessels, and in a red flash it was gone.

Sir Isambard pulled his rope. The coupler opened. Pressure cylinders beneath the coaches slammed outward into Phobic vacuum, and calipers pinched down tight on spinning brake disks.

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That was one, Sir Isambard thought, for history; even in its glory days the Great Western Railway had never slip-dropped more than one coach at a time.

The coaches slowed. The locomotive pulled far ahead.

Sir Isambard opened the throttle to its limit. He looked at black heaven: the ship was still chasing him. He pulled the Remington from the wall, checked its magazine; hoped Mr. Tolstoy was happy that it was finally being fired. Then he reached into a suit pocket and extracted a self-sealing patch. He stuck it over the Remington's recoil ports, then put on two more.

70 KPH. A new rumble could be felt through the plates. Out the window the sidewheel hydraulics strained. With a stiff smile Sir Isambard raised the gun and shot a pipe union. Fluid boiled from the break.

Hembersmith-Byrne stepped to the open rear door. He could feel the engine strain upward as the hydraulics began to fail. Red lights were flashing in the cab. With some pain he turned his back on them and stepped off the rear plate.

He fired down once. The no-longer-Recoilless kicked him upward. He continued to follow the train, above and behind. Still higher, the ship came in, for the kill.

Sir Isambard pointed the gun ahead, fired. He slowed, began to sink. He shot away some more momentum.

The ship swooped down.

King Arthur II shuddered as its support hydraulics failed. The cogs and rack held it down a second longer, then it rose shallowly, majestically from the tracks, travelling at more than twice Phobic escape velocity, finally leaving the surface of its world.

Slow, slow bully-boys, thought Sir Isambard, as the jumper's belly impacted his beautiful locomotive. There was no sound, of course. There were flashes of methane and electrical flame, clouds of escaping gas and liquid, parts that found their own individual escape vectors; and the great mass of two-machines-as-one that sailed, gliding, tumbling, off into black heaven.

Hembersmith-Byrne landed, rolling like a good paratrooper, then grabbed a side-channel of the railroad track before he could bounce off into space again. He got to his feet, dusted himself, looked up at the diminishing star in the sky.

He shook his head, took cable shackle in hand, and began walking the tracks back to Phobostown.

"You son of a water-waster!" Dr. Castelperugio screamed when

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she found Hembersmith-Byrne, drinking all alone in Claustro-Phobia.

"I'm sorry," he said, "well and truly sorry. I loved that bloody machine too." His eyes were half-shut.

"What? Oh! That—ah, hell, George, we'll build another one of those. Five or ten, maybe. I mean that . . . unscheduled stop . . . of yours.

"I suppose you know, don't you, that I didn't have my belt fastened? Me, a twenty-year rocklady? Oh, yeah. I was checking the observation car when the brakes kicked in. And I wound up on one of those fancy tables—flat on my back—in that black-flannel conductor's coat—"

Hembersmith-Byrne's mouth fell open. His eyes got wide. And he coughed . . . and chuckled . . . and laughed out load, tears running down his cheeks and wilting his sideburns.

She sat down on the table, looked briefly alarmed, then settled in. He took both her hands in his.

"Oh, I say," he choked out, "I do say—there's nothing left, is there? Excepting a *hieros gamos* to finish the comedy."

"Or an Epilogue?"

"Good wine needs no bush."

"It'll never work, George."

"We'll abbreviate it."

In the regional newssheets of a few weeks later appeared an announcement for the resumption of service on the Great Circum-Phobic Railway, Paddington Line, with the newly commissioned locomotive *Inchcliffe Castle.*

Below it was another announcement, which while not as lengthy required three times the headline width.

CORRECTION

On page 41 of our August 1980 issue, there appears an illustration for Sharon Farber's "Trans Dimensional Imports." The illustration is credited to Linda Miller, when in fact the artist was John Lakey. Our sincere apologies to both these fine artists.

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ROBOTS OF OZ
by Martin Gardner

This puzzle has three questions on the first round, one on the second, and one more on the third.

If by robot we mean a machine constructed to simulate a human being, there are three unusual robots that L. Frank Baum placed either in Oz or in one of the many magic realms just outside Oz. The Tin Woodman is not, of course, a robot but a former woodchopper whose human parts were gradually replaced by tin as they were chopped off by his enchanted ax. Here are three puzzles, each related to one of Baum's robots.

1. The Giant with the Hammer.

In *Ozma of Oz* (now happily available as a Del Rey paperback) a giant made of cast iron guards a narrow path leading to where the evil Nome King lives in Ev. The giant neither thinks nor speaks. His sole task is to pound the path continually with an iron hammer about the size of a barrel.

Now for an easy brain teaser. Assume that it takes one second to raise the hammer, and one second to lower it with a loud bong on the road. How many seconds elapse between one bong and the hundredth bong that follows?

2. Tiktok.

Tiktok also makes his first appearance in *Ozma of Oz*. As all Oz buffs know, he is a mechanical copper man made by Smith and Tinker, who also made the iron giant. But Tiktok is a much more complicated machine. He can think and speak as well as act. In fact, as Baum tell us, he "does everything but live."

Tiktok's actions, thoughts and speech are each controlled by a separate windup mechanism that can run down independently of the others. When his thought machinery runs down, but not his talking machinery, he scrambles words.

One day, when Tiktok was reciting a well known four-line poem by an American humorist, his thinking mechanism ran down but his speech mechanism somehow managed to rearrange the words to make a nonsense poem. Here is what Titok said:

I hope, but I never can cow you.
Rather I'd tell than be

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A one-to-one anyhow see-saw.
Purple I never see.

— by Lester Bustegg

Can you unscramble the words and reconstruct the original quatrain? I have taken liberties only with the punctuation and capitalizations. The author's name is an anagram of his real name.

3. Mr. Split.

Mr. Split appears in *Dot and Tot of Merryland,* a delightful fantasy by Baum that has long been out of print even though, like *The Wizard of Oz*, it was illustrated by W. W. Denslow. Merryland is near the northeast corner of Oz, just on the other side of the Deadly Desert that surrounds Oz.

The Sixth Valley of Merryland is inhabited by living wind-up toys. Mr. Split is a wooden robot whose job is to keep all the toys properly wound. To save time, he can unhook his red left side from his white right side. Each side can then hop about on one leg and wind up toys twice as fast as Mr. Split could manage when not split in half.

Unhooked, Mr. Left Split speaks only the left halves of words, and Mr. Right Split speaks only the right halves. Assume that if a word has an odd number of letters, the middle letter is omitted by either half of Mr. Split. Below are six familiar proverbs spoken by Mr. Right Split. Can you supply the full words?

TCH N ME ES NE
E O ATES S ST
ING NE ERS O SS
RD N E ND S TH O N E SH
OK ORE U AP
RES O CE KE ME

Answers to all questions will be found on page 67.

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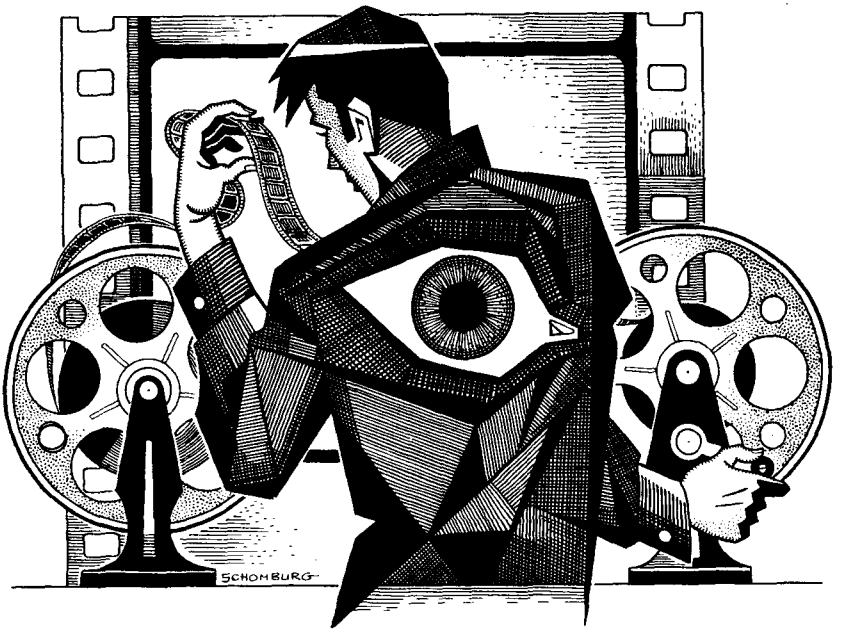
OUTSIDER
by Skip Wall
art: Alex Schomburg



Mr. Wall reports that he used to have a long list of hobbies, but that writing has edged most of them into the closet. He lives with his wife—a full-time career woman who's pursuing a Master's degree in Systems Management at USC—in Irvine CA, in a new house surrounded by acres (or so it seems when preparing a lawn) of dirt. They hope to move to Oregon in a few years, fight mold instead of ants in the kitchen, and spend lots more time on writing.

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If you're in the writing mode, if you feel the part, the New World Coffee Shop is a great place to sit on a rainy Saturday afternoon, gazing out the window at downtown Seattle. The dank weather and the heavy-booted, bundled shapes huddling past are rich with mood, with story ideas. But if you're convinced the world is about to submit to an undignified end, or if you suspect you're merely mad, there's no worse place to be.

Usually, the Mozart the New World plays on the stereo is soothing; that day, even *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* sounded forlorn. My familiar round oak table stared up at me, as uncompromising as an estranged wife. The normally warm, comforting pot of Lapsang Souchong tea sat cold, next to my notebook. I flipped open the hardbound green cover, which announced to the world that it was actually the property of the U.S. Government, no matter what aspiring writer's scribblings it might contain. Inside the first page, the strips of film still refused to dissolve, begrudging me the tranquil, self-absorbed world I was used to. Typewriter clackings by day, movie projections by night. Few friends, no obligations. My heart seemed to answer that neat summary. The end. The end. The end.

I flipped the notebook closed impatiently, stubbing out my cigarette with its twisted brothers. Jim was late as usual, and I needed to talk to him, to almost anyone. I looked up between the sections of stained glass in the front window, and was relieved to see his rain-rippled image crossing the street in the center of the block, avoiding the traffic with effortless disdain as he always did. The wide-brimmed yellow plastic hat Jim had worn since we were students bounced between parked cars; he was obstinately umbrellaless in the habit of most Northwesterners. He disappeared from sight for a moment, then the little bell tinkled as he pushed open the door.

Jim Farragut wore the protective coloration affected by many middle-class bohemians north of the Oregon-California line: green, waterproof hunting boots; jeans; a cable-knit sweater under a shaggy beard. A typical Great Northwest associate professor of English, fresh from the podium. In all fairness, Jim thinks I dress like a grad student from Amherst. *You distance yourself too much, Don. You think it helps you observe. I think you're afraid to get out there and live.* A typically candid Jim remark. As an old friend, he had the right, I suppose. I waved to Susie, the waitress; she came over as he was sitting down.

"Bring this fellow a cherry grenadine Amalfi."

"Thanks, Don," he said, shuffling out of his dripping, checked,

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loggers jacket. "You sounded a little upset when you called. What's going on?"

Jim's flyaway hair and beard carried glistening imported drops. Concerned, intelligent grey eyes peered at me from either side of a long, slightly hooked nose; his wire-rims lent a deceptive air of confusion. He's the sort who will listen with humility, with a diffident respectful air to what you have to say. When the Muse opposite runs down, he'll nod quietly once or twice, as if the fundamental structure of his thinking has been transformed. Then, without warning, he will efficiently, charmingly dissect everything he has just heard, hanging inconsistency, anomaly, conceit, and contradiction out to dry like dirty laundry. He has the best bull detector I've ever known; that's why I called. I wanted him to listen hard, give his little nod, and tell me I was hopelessly paranoid.

"Jim, when was the last time you went to a movie?"

"Two, three years ago." He shrugged. "You know me." Jim generally despises movies, which is one reason I thought I could trust him.

"Good."

"What do you mean?"

I took a deep breath.

"Two weeks ago the management took me off the matinee shift on the Fiftieth Street Cinema, and started me on the evening show over at the Puget Big Three." He frowned at my apparent change of subject. Jim likes things neat and orderly.

"The giant mass culture boxes over at the shopping center."

"Right. The Fiftieth was only a few blocks from my apartment, but there are compensations at the Big Three. The new projectors are so automatic and foolproof all I really do is babysit. I turn down the soundtrack on my monitor and read."

I paused. Back to the point.

"Anyway, they had a new man on the matinee shift, and he was death on prints. He couldn't get used to the new equipment. They finally fired him, but not before he left me an hour of splicing each night for a week. That's how I first noticed them."

"Noticed what?"

"The overprints." Now was not the time to pause. On with it. "I would never have seen the first one if I hadn't had a splice right next to it. They're faint, just barely readable to the naked eye on the film."

"What kind of overprints?"

"It was . . . propaganda. A slogan."

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"Ohhhh, yes. I remember reading about that. Subliminal advertising. Back in the fifties and early sixties. The printed message flashes for only a fraction of a second, but it registers on the subconscious. Right in the middle of *Gone with the Wind,* you have to get up and buy a Chevrolet."

"I know, I . . . "

"Sure." He warmed to the subject. "I remember a picture they had in one of the newsmagazines. It said 'Toasty Oats' right across a German tank being blown up in the Battle of the Bulge. The practice was outlawed, of course." He smiled. "Actually, I don't think that kind of manipulation is any more crass than a lot of the overt garbage we're inundated with. The only answer is to ignore everything. But you found some on your films?"

"Jim, if it had said Toasty Oats it wouldn't have bothered me."

His expression said *cut the melodrama,* but I wasn't doing it on purpose.

"What they said was . . . they said 'The K'nargh bring joy.' "

"The what?"

"The K'nargh. Bring joy."

He blinked twice. Then he nodded his little nod. No "What the hell are K'nargh." No concern for a friend who is obviously on the brink. No skeptical snort. It was in character, but I was still disappointed.

"Go on."

"Well, I cut out the frame and examined it more closely. The letters were faint, like I said, and a little blurry around the edges. Ghostlike, bluish, as if the negative had been exposed to some kind of radiation. I had the reel on the rewind rack, so I ran through about half of it. I found two more. 'The K'nargh bless you. The K'nargh greet you.' That kind of stuff. There may have been others, they're hard to see. But anybody watching that Robert Redford flick is going to be primed for the K'nargh."

Still no response. He nodded again, urging me on. Maybe he was saving a concise proof of my psychopathy for the end.

"At first it didn't make any sense to me. Then I thought maybe the K'nargh were some new religious cult who had a technician working for one of the distributors. How could they lose, with Robert Redford and Barbra Streisand out there cranking up a thousand converts a night? In a few months, they could make the Moonies and the Children of God look trivial. The people in this town aren't sophisticated enough to . . . "

He gave me the look reserved for my Eastern conceits. I plunged

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on, wanting to get it all out.

"I went home that night and decided to tell the manager, Mr. Porteous, in the morning. I thought he'd notify the distributor and I might get a small column in the paper for uncovering a religious plot. I was very wrong. When I told Porteous what I'd found, and I tried to show him the frames I'd cut out, he got a sort of blank look and—"

"He fired you."

My lips still framed the word "He . . .

"Go on," said Jim, "I'm comparing our thought processes."

Something very strange was going on. I had expected bemused interest, some undertone of scepticism, but he was a jump ahead. I eyed him carefully. He knew something he wasn't letting on, which was also in character. Jim is a dialectical sandbagger of the first order.

"Okay. I got suspicious, thinking Porteous was involved with these K'nargh characters. After I collected my paycheck, I sneaked up to the projection room to check out the print of the other feature I'd shown the night before. I knew I was trespassing, and taking a chance on getting caught, but I sensed . . . something important, something sinister. The matinee man wasn't due for two hours, so I checked out both reels, foot by foot. I found more overprints, only it was a little clearer who the K'nargh were supposed to be."

For the first time, Jim seemed really interested. He leaned forward, elbows in his hands. I told him how strange it had been, up there in the projection room with only the little bench light on, afraid of getting caught any minute, poring over reels of film like some manic collector. Every time I'd found the subtle, bluish printing on a frame, I'd felt closer to something inevitable. I'd cut out and spliced half a dozen frames which sat in a ragged row on the bench, glaring up at me like bad-tempered rodents removed from their lair into bright sunlight. I had just about decided I had enough to take to the authorities when I found that last one. I'd sat frozen for a while, staring at the thing, spun out suddenly from its hiding place with the power to shock.

We'll come down soon, it said.

Part of me said, "Hey, it's just some nut working in a processing plant. In Southern California where they make the films, the Flying Saucer faddists are as thick as flies." Another part of me said, "People like that aren't generally large on the technical knowledge and perseverence necessary to accomplish something like this." That thought left a disturbing alternative.

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That afternoon at home was depressing. On my work table, sitting among familiar marked-up manuscripts and blue-bleeding proofs, the shiny bits of film looked far less ominous. I didn't think I'd be taken very seriously if I put them on some FBI agent's desk. "Oh, yes *sir*. That's very interesting. Just fill out form 8725, here. It's the one we give to all the crackpots." Not only that, I was facing the shoe leather express the next day in search of another job. I had been cursing my tendency to overdramatize when my phone rang. It was Porteous.

"What the hell are you doing? You're fifteen minutes late for work."

"Huh?"

"Get yourself down here before I can you."

"Right."

My feet stopped their anticipatory aching. I'd rather work for a manager given to mental lapses than haggle with a new one over a starting pittance. Besides, that night was the first run of a new double feature. I wanted to look at the new reels and find nothing. Under my umbrella on the way to work, the hissing downpour and the swish of the traffic had seemed very solid, reassuring. Just some nut who had access to a few negative reels wanting to share his ideas with an unwilling public. You see? All these people believe. You see? You see?

During the first show, I put Candice Bergen and James Garner on the rewind reels. After about ten feet of film, I hissed a curse.

Come unto us like children.

Now I was getting scared. This had to be big. Last week's show had been National General. This film was UA, a completely different distributor. I checked the cans. Routed in from Cincinatti. This was a lot more than some crazy in a film plant. These goddamn things were going out all over the country.

"Jim," I said finally, "I think we're being manipulated. Prepared for some kind of . . . " I hesitated, knowing how banal, how silly the words would sound, time-warped from a fifties science fiction script. " . . . some kind of invasion."

A pause, while he considered, head cocked.

"You're probably right."

Now he was humoring me, and I didn't like it. In a sense, he was making light of my unexpressed plans for dealing with the situation. Unreasonably, I resented him. A touch of embarassment perhaps, that the K'nargh had given me an excuse to isolate myself, to take the comfortable path, though I couldn't admit it until later.

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It would be years, I thought, before the K'nargh took over everything. The insidious subtlety of the preliminaries showed they depended on deceit as much as whatever unimaginable weaponry they might possess. Perhaps they were limited by some code that prevented overt conquest. I suspected the quiet spots, the backwashes would be unaffected for a long time. My map of British Columbia showed a small town north of Victoria about a hundred miles, Bamfield. My nest egg would rent me a small house for a year or so, while I worked odd jobs and read everything I could on backwoods survival. It had a certain poetic appeal, moving farther and farther north into the purity of the Canadian woods, just ahead of an invisible alien tide. And now my little plan was dismissed as a trivial afterthought by judicious eyebrows.

"Look, James. I asked you to come down here because I'm deeply disturbed about this business and you come across like some omniscience therapist. What do you mean, 'You're probably right'?"

"Don, take it easy. It's just tee shirts."

"Tee shirts!" I lowered my voice as heads turned. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"I mean tee shirts and plastic toys and trashy paperback books and every other damned thing you can think of. It'll make D-day look like a side show."

I waited for him to explain.

"Don, you're forgetting the massive media blitz on everything and anything having to do with space visitors. The last couple of months it's been like wildfire. Even Melanie bought me a tee shirt that says 'They're Here!' on the front, with a picture of this smiling, green face. Nice artwork, really a benevolent expression. Makes you almost wish . . . " His eyes clouded for a moment, very un-Jimlike. "Anyway, it's the biggest saucer craze since the fifties, bigger even. I'm surprised you didn't make the connection earlier. The subliminals on the film are just part of it, though I'm a little surprise they've gone that far. 'K'nargh' was probably picked by computer, just like 'Exxon' was, for maximum marketing effect. Some kind of lowest common denominator. K'nargh bubble bath in the grinning plastic green bottle. Mister K'nargh lunchboxes. Baby K'nargh wet-a-pants. I bet in two weeks we'll be swamped. You just happened to hit on the groundwork. They've been building up to it for months. Haven't you noticed?"

"Well, I have been spending a lot of time on the draft for the novel the last month or two."

"Don, I keep telling you you spend too much time cooped up in

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that garret of yours. Don't you see why the manager fired you? He probably knew about the overprints himself and didn't want the Nader people descending on his theatre for a test case. After he figured he had you shook up, he hired you back, assuming you'd keep quiet if you had something to lose."

He was making sense. I was beginning to feel back in the real world again. It was all just part of a giant ad campaign. But one or two things still bothered me.

"What about these? They were on the last reel of the other feature." I pulled out a few short strips of film.

"Hold it up to the light. See? Across the bottom there."

" 'Hello,' " he read.

"Right, but above it, superimposed on the frame."

"It looks like a face."

"Well, what about it? That strange shape. No ears, a head like a sideways football. And that nasty grin. Doesn't it seem a little creepy for hawking toys?"

"Nah. It's almost the same face as the one on my tee shirt."

"Oh."

"You know, it *is* damned manipulative when you think of it. God knows what they're doing on television, for crying out loud. No wonder Melanie bought me that shirt. I wish I could wean her away from that TV set." He shook his head. Though perceptive and occasionally indignant, Jim wasn't what you'd call an activist.

"Madison Avenue bastards," he said. "Inundate the whole country with cat food and toothpaste, and now this."

"One more thing, Jim. These frames here."

He slurped the last of his Amalfi, holding the film up to the light.

"Gahresezh. Hittak. Faglim . . . hunh."

He covered his mouth and burped politely.

"New product names. You'll probably see them soon on a bubble gum wrapper. 'Imported from Mars' or some such. Look, Don, it's always good to see you, but I've got a couple of afternoon tutorials. Freshman English may be a cesspool, but we all make our little sacrifices so we can eat." He stood with an air of regret. A bit of put-on kindness for an old friend, perhaps.

He shrugged on the big coat, leaving me deflated; my fearsome little fantasy of insinuating invasion was fading quickly.

"Thanks for the soda, Don. Come on over for dinner sometime soon. We'll have a few people for you to meet. You need more of a social life. Call me next week."

"Right."

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"Take it easy." He paused for a moment, his hand on the antique doorknob. "Why don't you take a few days off from writing. Drive up to B. C. or something."

There it was, the benediction I had prayed for earlier, now merely an embarrassing reflection on my planned, slightly paranoic flight.

"Good idea." I smiled and he was gone.

Susie rewarmed my tea. I sipped for a while, deciding to go home and write a few hundred words on the novel before going to work. That should cement reality back together as firmly as ever. The last few days of hinted nightmare seemed silly now, the product of too many hours alone spinning often-unsold tales on an aging Selectric.

As I started home, the Seattle sun burst with wet glory, drying the streets after their daily bath. A fresh breeze blew up from the iron-gray Sound where Japanese freighters basked, waiting to carry their loads of logs and chips home. Spring in a few weeks. Maybe I *should* go up to Victoria for a few days, before the tourists swarmed in. Jim was right, as usual. I whistled, watching the dark image of my raincoat and umbrella swing back and forth in front of me. I was safe again; my small apartment, my typewriter, my tidily ordered existence waited.

Timing, they say, is everything. Perceptions, understanding, reality are all based on seriality; certain things seen in a certain sequence can cloak, can reveal, can sometimes shout the truth.

There were some kids coming out of the local theater a few blocks from the New World. Just a chance meeting really. If Jim had conversed a moment more, a moment less, I might have lived in peace a little longer. But no, seriality played its game. Three boys about twelve years old walked out, chattering and eating candy bars, along with a swarm of other kids. I glanced at the bill. Walt Disney, rated G. I smiled with distant remembered Saturday afternoons. The three boys walked around me on the sidewalk as kids will do, two on one side, one on the other.

"Let's go to my house. Mom's not home 'til four. Grysgh hokat pulma."

Another giggled. "You dope. Hanffro koppus. Hittak faglim."

All three laughed, and started to run all at once, almost telepathically the way twelve-year-old friends can.

"Granfus K'nargh," one of them shouted.

I stood on the pavement, half-turned, looking after them, while other kids flowed around me chattering. The high pitched chorus took on an unreal, threatening quality as I listened, searching the young faces.

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No. No, no. It's just bubble gum and iron-on patches for the seats of ten-year-olds. Of course it is. Oh, please. But that shout echoed, insistent, mocking.

Hittak faglim. Granfus K'nargh.

I didn't go to work that night, or ever again. Porteous called, of course, but I hardly spoke to him. I knew it would do no good to explain; the poor fool must be well programmed by now. He loves to watch his own features, over and over again. Of course, I thought about staying on. I could probably cut the overprints out of every reel that came in. But that's only one theatre. There are over a hundred in Seattle alone, and thousands more across the country and the world, all pumping out greetings and language training from the K'nargh. It's only a matter of time.

God knows what they're doing on television. Jim's right there, I'm sure. And Melanie has the one in the corner of their living room on fourteen hours a day. Jim doesn't watch much himself, but who knows what's pouring into his subconscious, what strange baggage the canned laughter and disjointed dialogue carries? What unspeakable obeisance oozes between the words on the evening news?

It took weeks to confirm my decision to leave my adopted city, to declare that final divorce from a transmogrifying humanity. Something delayed me, some vague sense of obligation. There must be others like me, others who were cut off from the mainstream media at the critical time. Me, by virtue of contemptuous familiarity; they by virtue of their work. Merchant mariners. Trappers in the woods. Isolated construction crews. They would notice the strange new patterns of life emerging. Could I join them somehow? Could we stop it? I thought not. A few reluctant grains of sugar cannot stop the upended bag from emptying into the cauldron. Still, I hung back. My old Dodge Dart was filled, waiting. *Tomorrow. Tomorrow, yes.*

I took to long walks in maritime Seattle. I had always liked it, especially now. Old town and the docks were a good place to ignore the subtle changes I saw, distortions no one else seemed to notice. The eager whine of winches and forklifts, the shouts of stevedores displaced my fears, pushed back for a time the new slang, the odd words in *Newsweek* and *Time* that weren't typos, the strange undertones and inflections carried by voices in the streets.

I stood at the end of Pier 8, listening to men at men's work, letting the cold wind from across Puget Sound toss my uncomplaining hair and rustle fitfully in my ears. Fifty miles away across the water, the Olympic mountains slept hard under white veils. Gray-blue water lapped and danced its cold cadence. I felt immeasurably alone,

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watching a familiar world of known comforts and fears transform itself into something unknowable, alien. I was soon to be an outsider in a far more profound sense than I had ever known.

A whistle blew behind me. Noon. The clouds were stubborn today, no sunny afternoon. Two stevedores ambled over, lunchpails swinging. They sat on the edge of the pier, legs hanging; wax paper rustled under strong fingers. I stood, they ate, worlds apart even in the best of times. After a while, the lunchboxes clunked shut.

"Hey, buddy. Got a light?"

One of them looked at me with his cigarette dangling. His face was substantial, weathered under a knit cap. A man who pushed strong arms into a jacket each morning knowing his work would bring no particular rancor or joy. Nobody's fool. I dug into my corduroy jacket and handed him my lighter. Wordlessly, he took it and cupped his cigarette against the wind. After a few tries, it lit. He reached the lighter back up to me.

"Grashkit," he said. The strange word clashed with familiar gestures, with the utterly human cigarette smoke sigh. He didn't know, of course. I wanted to shake him, to shout. Then, as he looked up at me, a little annoyed by my stare, I saw something in his eye, that same stolid strength I had seen bending backs over fishing nets and hauling logs and huddled arm to arm in bars over Oly and Bud. One day this man will wake up to discover he's been twisted, toyed with. No depression, no introspection here. On that day, the invaders would find their hands full.

It suddenly struck me that I could hasten that day, I and others like me. This man and his wide, confident shoulders needed me to pick at that unfelt wound of slavery, to make sure it never healed. And I needed him.

The tiny house somewhere north beckoned, but that stubbornness that had held me defined itself, finally said *no, no more hiding from life*. I had a kinship with this man, a kinship that would someday merge with billions of other in a tide of revenge. Dark times were coming, and I had been given the torch.

I took the lighter with a smile, the first one in weeks.

"Sure, pal," I said. "Anytime."

That night I unpacked my car.

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SMILE . . .

by Tim Colley

art: Marc Schirmeister

The author now lives with wife and cat in Hawaii, where he is involved in importing and distributing superior Australian wines and beer to the insatiable Hawaiian market, combining business and thirst and aiming towards early retirement.

"Meddling with the occult has its dangers," mused Petronius.

He was standing in the livingroom of Sir Mannerly Gorge-Rising, the choleric and decadent TV mogul. At the feet of the famed Deducer lay the honourable gentleman, strangely shrunken. There was a professional, tell-tale squareness about the corners of the staring eyes. . . .

Apparently suffering from shortcomings in his station ratings, the nobleman had turned to black magic in an attempt to augment his market. The evening newscasts had been enlivened by goat-slayings, while tomorrow's weather forecasts rested in the hands of the few necromantic weatherpersons who could read rooster entrails.

The room was filled with a strong caramel odour. On a priceless Persian carpet stood a smouldering cauldron; cabalistic signs were scrawled on the floor and walls.

But Petronius and the eighteen-man SWAT team had little time for the corpse; their attention was welded to the apparition in the corner. There stood a huge fire-breathing monster with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail. It huffed and snorted uneasily, dripping a glossy coating onto the carpeting.

Petronius motioned the squad forward. "Arrest that figment—but take care, he's powerfully sticky." The hulking brute was swiftly secured and led away.

"Can you tell me just what's been going on here?" demanded the SWAT leader.

"The evidence suggests that that poor, unfounded conception triggered off a heart attack in the man as soon as it was hit with the

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boiling sugar."

"Then Sir Mannerly acted first in self-defense?"

"No. I think he planned the sugar-coating deliberately. He summoned the creature so that he could subject us all to something inhuman, using the beast itself on television."

"??"

"Ask yourself this—could there by anything worse than five thousand episodes of the new, candied chimera?"

ANSWERS TO ROBOTS OF OZ (from page 54)

1. 198 seconds.

2. I never saw a purple cow.
   I never hope to see one.
   But I can tell you anyhow,
   I'd rather see than be one.

   The author is Gelett Burgess.

3. A stitch in time saves nine.
   He who hesitates is lost.
   A rolling stone gathers no moss.
   A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
   Look before you leap.
   There's no place like home.

Someone once suggested that Baum may have invented the word OZ by taking the abbreviation of his home state, NY, then shifting each letter one step forward in the alphabet. After Baum died, the Oz books were continued by Ruth Plumly Thompson, who lived in Pennsylvania. What remarkable coincidence links *her* home state with Oz? See page 81 for the answer.

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TOUCH OF THE BEAR

by Pat Murphy
art: Laura Buscemi

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The author lives above a liquor store in La Jolla, California—the closest she could manage to a writer's garret. Ms. Murphy is 24 and makes her living as a science writer. She has sold six stories and is presently working on a novel. The first draft of this story was written at the 1978 Clarion workshop.

The spirit who takes the form of a she-bear has been sniffing around my hut for the past three nights. She cannot touch me; the bear claws that dangle from the thong around my neck are a powerful protection.

I sit in the meadow by my hut and chip the flint spearhead to create an edge. She circles me in the tall grass, her shaggy body sometimes blocking out the sun. As I work, I chant in the Old Tongue, asking why she is here. She does not answer; but when she looks at me, her red-rimmed eyes are expectant: something is coming.

She swings her heavy head to look across the meadow, and on the path from the Outside I see two spots of color, moving slowly. A shout echoes across the valley—"Hello, Sam!"—and I recognize the deep voice. My blood brother, Marshall, has returned to the valley. When I look back to the spirit, she dissolves into a gray mist that vanishes in the afternoon sun.

Setting aside my tools, I stand and bare my teeth in a smile, just as Marshall taught me long ago. The barrels of the rifles lashed to Marshall's pack gleam in the sun as he strides across the meadow toward me.

He has gained weight since last we hunted together. He is still a large man—broad-shouldered and muscular—but his muscles have become soft. Three claws—taken from the bear which he and I killed—hang from a chain around his neck.

He stands before me, grinning. "You're smart not to venture out of the Preserve, Sam," he says. "I'm glad to be back." Beneath his smile is a tension that had not been there when I saw him two years before. He swings his pack to the ground and shakes back his hair. "I need to get clear of civilization again."

The woman at his side is young, scarcely more than a girl. Her hair is the color that Marshall's was before it turned gray—the

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golden brown of the meadow grass in the summer. Though she is taller than I am by more than a hand's breadth, she would be considered thin and weak by the standards of my people. She has delicate features like the rest of the humans: pointed chin, small nose, no protecting brow ridges.

"This is my daughter, Kirsten," Marshall says, putting his arm around her shoulders. "Kirsten, this is Sam, the last of the Neanderthals."

She holds out her hand to me.

I know that by human standards I am a curiosity: broad-shouldered and stocky, my face too broad, my nose too flat. Some humans have judged me stupid because my brow slopes back where theirs rises in a high forehead. I am not stupid. The rich fools who brought me from the past to serve as keeper in their game preserve trained me in English. Though my voice is gruff, I speak the language well. I spoke well in my case before the World Court. The final judgement ruled me human and granted me the Preserve to repay me for being taken from my own time.

Kirsten's touch on my hand is cool, and her eyes meet mine. She is young, but she has the eyes of a shaman. A feeling of power surrounds her.

"We are here to hunt," Marshall says. "I want to hunt the cave bear." His eyes are troubled, and I know that he too remembers when we first met—two young warriors from different ends of time and he said: "I want to hunt the cave bear."

Now I understand that the she-bear spirit has been waiting for the hunt and I wonder at the anticipation that I saw in her eyes. "The omens are bad for hunting, brother," I say. "See how tall the grass is. It is too late in the spring to hunt the bear—she will be awake and alert."

"We hunted before in late spring." The tension beneath Marshall's smile has increased.

"We were younger and more foolish then."

"We can be young and foolish again."

"We can be foolish," I say.

"We must hunt." There is an undercurrent of fear in his voice. "If you don't hunt with me, I'll hunt alone."

I frown, but I do not ask why—the mood that is upon him leaves no room for argument. "The moon's full tonight," he says. "We can roll the bones and let the spirits decide." I know that Marshall does not believe in the spirits; he wears the bear claws around his neck as a courtesy to me. He believes in what he calls the laws of prob-

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ability—and I know that he hopes that the laws will bend in his favor tonight.

"We will roll the bones," I agree, admitting defeat. The spirits will decide and I fear I know what their decision will be.

At dusk, I leave the hut to hunt for our dinner. I take Kirsten with me.

The insects in the grass call to each other with shrill cries as I follow the stream around the edge of the meadow. We walk in silence except for the sound of Kirsten's pant legs brushing against the tall grass.

When she speaks, her voice carries the power that I can see in her eyes. "Why don't you ever leave this valley, Sam?" she asks.

I have not left the Preserve since the decision of the World Court granted me the land. "There is nothing for me Outside," I say. "I live here now."

"Do you wish you could go back to your old world?" she asks.

"The World Court would not allow it. They fear the consequences of sending me back," I say. I have wondered what would have happened if I had returned to my tribe: how would I have disturbed the flow of time in my world?

"But do you want to go back?" she asks again.

I consider her question, remembering the day I arrived in the Preserve. I was a confused youth, brought into a world I did not understand by rich men who were playing with a new toy. I learned to live without the comfort and strength of my tribe. I learned to negotiate with the spirits with no shaman to aid me. I learned my own power.

"I changed by coming to this world," I say. I shrug and repeat, "I live here now. This valley is enough for me. I am old."

She hesitates, then says, "My father is afraid he is getting old, Sam. That's why he must hunt again."

"He is old," I say. "I am old." I do not understand these people. Though Marshall and I are blood brothers, I do not understand him.

She shrugs. "It is different for him. He must go hunting again." She is tense, but I cannot tell the source of her fear.

As we walk close by the stream, a mist rises from the water. The mist solidifies and the great she-bear paces by Kirsten's side. The spirit nuzzles Kirsten's hair and snuffles on her neck, but the woman walks on, unaware of the beast that looms over her. I stop, watching the spirit and the woman. Though Kirsten has the eyes of a shaman, she does not see. Her power is unfocussed.

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In the Old Tongue, the she-bear growls that she grants us permission to hunt the cave bear. I read trickery and deception in her eyes: she is a capricious spirit: sometimes generous, sometimes vindictive, but always dangerous. Kirsten frowns back at me, not knowing why I have stopped.

"Do you promise success in the hunt?" I ask the spirit in the Old Tongue.

"What?" Kirsten asks. "Who are you talking to?"

The spirit dissolves into mist without answering my question, and Kirsten repeats, "Who are you talking to?"

"I saw a spirit following you," I say. "You did not see her?"

She shakes her head, looking as doubtful as her father had when I had first told him that I must ask the spirits for permission to hunt. "Your father does not see the spirits," I tell Kirsten. "He does not believe in them. But you have the eyes of a shaman. You do not know your own power."

"A magic worker?" she says. "No, not me." She looks around her, surveying the grass and the stream. "I don't see any spirit."

"She is gone," I say.

"I didn't see anything," she insists, and follows me as I walk beside the stream. After a moment she asks, "What kind of spirit was it?"

I motion her to silence, because I have spotted a herd of wild swine in the distance. They raise their heads as we stalk them, but they are confident that we are too far away to do them harm. In the Old Tongue I call to them, asking one of them to die. An aged boar shakes his head and steps toward us. Muttering an apology to the spirits for the use of the rifle, I lift the weapon and kill him with a single shot. The rest of the herd scatters.

Kirsten follows me to the kill. "What did you call out before you fired?" she asks.

"I asked which beast wanted to die." Kneeling by the boar's body, I untie the obsidian knife from the thong at my side. The boar's tusks are strong; his shoulders are broad. His spirit could aid me in the coming hunt. I slit his throat and his spirit slips out and stares at me with ferocious eyes. The spirit stamps its feet in the grass and nuzzles its dead body.

"Can you see the boar's spirit there in the grass?" I ask Kirsten.

She glances at me, follows my eyes, and shakes her head. "All I see is grass. If my father doesn't see your spirits, why do you think I can?"

The spirit glares at me and I call to it in the Old Tongue. It charges but I am ready. The battle is silent; the spirit roars within me and

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my spirit roars with it. It stamps its feet, but I surround it, holding it close as a mother holds a child.

I open my eyes and Kirsten is standing before me. She looks puzzled, worried, and she asks hesitantly, "What were you doing?"

"I have taken the spirit of the boar. When you kill an animal, you must take his spirit. Or his spirit will take yours. Your father does not understand that." I stop, still clutching the obsidian knife, my hand sticky with blood. When Marshall killed the she-bear so many years ago, he should have taken the animal's spirit. If he had, she would not be stalking us now.

"You really believe that?" she asks, and her voice is young.

I shrug. "The spirits are all around us. How could I not believe?" I shoulder the carcass and we start back to the hut in silence.

"What kind of spirit was following me?" she asks again.

"A she-bear," I answer. "She says you are hers."

When we are a short distance from the hut, she speaks again. "Don't tell my father about this, all right?"

"It would not matter," I say. "Your father does not believe."

When we reach the hut, I help Marshall skin and bleed the boar while Kirsten sets up the shelter that they brought with them. Marshall talks as he works about his life in the Outside. Though he does not say so, I know that he has not been happy during the past few years. "Kirsten and I are finally trying to get to know each other," he says. "Her mother and I were divorced years ago. I never visited them much when she was a kid. But she's my only child."

I watch Kirsten setting up the shelter and beside her, the she-bear spirit walks. "Do you see the gray shadow beside your daughter" I ask him. He frowns, squinting in the direction of his daughter, then shakes his head. "The spirit of the bear that you killed has claimed Kirsten for her own," I continue. "She is following your daughter."

"Sam—" he begins, but I interrupt.

"Just because you cannot see it, do not deny it exists," I say.

"Hey, look," he says. He lifts the bear claws from around his neck and holds them in one hand. The she-bear looks toward us with interest. "You said that these would protect me against the spirit. I'll give them to Kirsten."

"Put them back on," I say sharply. The spirit is shambling in our direction. "You need them. Your daughter is strong; she can do without." The spirit pauses as Marshall slips the chain back over his head, then turns back. I face Marshall and say, "I will teach your daughter to fight the spirit. She will learn."

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That evening, we eat roast pork and drink the wine that Marshall brought in from the Outside. When Kirsten pours her wine, she spills a few drops on the ground. A gray mist swirls above the damp spot, but no spirit forms.

Marshall is yawning when the moon reaches its zenith. I pull the bones from the pouch at my side and explain to Kirsten that they are knucklebones taken from the first cave bear I killed. The three bones are rubbed smooth on one side and are marked with a notch on the other.

At my command, Marshall smooths the dust on the ground before him, facing toward the moon so that his shadow falls behind him. As he casts the bones on the ground, I chant softly in the Old Tongue, asking whether the hunt will succeed.

The bones fall with the smooth side up—all three. "The hunt will succeed," I say. Marshall smiles at me. The flickering light of the fire catches in the wrinkles under his eyes. Though he looks tired, some of the tension has left him.

"We'll have a long day's hike tomorrow," he says. "We'd better turn in."

Kirsten remains by the fire. "I'll join you soon," she says. "I'm really not tired yet." The tension returns to Marshall's face. I can see the fear that Kirsten spoke of: he fears old age; he fears the passage of time. But he goes to the shelter alone.

I crouch by the fire and fill my pipe with the tobacco that Marshall brought for me. I puff the sweet smoke thoughtfully. Smoking is the only human habit I have acquired since I was brought from the past. A pipe is a boon to a man who sits by the fire to contemplate his past and to consider his future.

"Why did you come here?" I ask Kirsten. I need to know more about this girl-woman who does not realize her own power.

"My father asked me to come," she says. I wait, asking no more. She continues, after a pause, in a lower voice. "My father found something here when he was young. I thought—" She breaks off her sentence and shrugs. "I don't really know what I'm looking for."

I nod. She is much like her father was as a youth. But where he was a raw warrior, hers is another sort of power.

"Tell me about the spirit that was following me," she asks. "Why does it follow?"

"The she-bear follows because you are powerful but you do not know your strength."

"I am not powerful," Kirsten says.

"Why do you back away from your power?" I ask. When she does

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not speak, I continue, "She will enter you as the spirit of the boar entered me. Unless you recognize your power, you will not be able to fight her." I blow a puff of smoke from my pipe at the gray mist that swirls beside Kirsten and the bulky shape of the spirit appears. She grumbles and snuffles, twitching her hairy ears and squinting her tiny eyes to gaze at me across the fire. "Look there," I say to Kirsten. "The spirit is back."

Kirsten stares in the direction that I am pointing. "I can't see anything."

The she-bear interrupts me, growling in the Old Tongue that I must not teach Kirsten: the woman is hers. I growl back, asking her if she fears a fair battle. In answer, the spirit opens her mouth and rears back to her full height, towering above the fire, twice as tall as a standing man. From there, she vanishes, fading into mist.

Kirsten still gazes at the spot where I pointed and I say, "She is gone. But she will be back. You must learn to fight her. I will teach you how." But even as I say the brave words I wonder if I can teach this woman with a shaman's eyes to see what she does not want to see.

At dawn, we begin the three-day journey to the cave of the bear. Marshall is alert at breakfast and Kirsten watches him with concern. "He's taking stimulants," she tells me when Marshall is out of ear-shot. "He can't keep that up all trip."

During the morning hours, we hike along the stream through the foothills, passing herds of bison and swine. We see a herd of mammoths across the valley and give them a wide berth. Toward afternoon, as we start to climb higher in the grassy hills, Marshall hikes more slowly. His shoulders sag beneath the weight of the pack, and he sweats more than the sun and heat demand. "Are you well, brother?" I ask when we stop to rest and he snaps, "Of course. I'm fine," then tries to soften his tone with a smile. "We should worry about the youngest in the group." He gestures toward Kirsten, who has been carrying her pack steadily without complaint. She lags behind when we begin hiking again and I know the reason is her father's weariness, not her own.

We make camp earlier than I would have wished, but I am concerned for Marshall's health. At dinner, he eats only a little dried meat, and he goes to his bed while the moon is rising. "My father is burning himself out," Kirsten says. "He's relying on drugs to keep going. He's afraid to slow down."

I smoke my pipe, savoring the taste of the tobacco, and watch her

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face. "He says he does not know you well, that he left your mother when you were young. How is it that you know so much of him?"

She laughs, a harsh, abrupt sound. "I watched him on TV. I read his books. I saw every film he made a dozen times. Of course I know him. He's the best-loved adventurer around." She stares into the fire. "People say that I am very much like him. Maybe that's why I can't see the spirits that you do."

"You will see," I say. In a shadow some distance from the fire, the she-bear laughs. Kirsten does not look up from the flames. The spirit paces toward her and stands beside her. Kirsten makes no sign that she senses the spirit's presence. "Can you see the shadow that looms above you?" I ask.

"I see moonlight and firelight," she says. But she blinks and for a moment, I think that her eyes focus on the spirit. But she shakes her head in denial. "I can't fight what I can't see."

The next day's journey is longer and harder. We are climbing the shoulders of the mountain. Kirsten trails behind her father, intentionally slow, holding back her power and pretending to be weaker than she is. Marshall is pale. When we stop at lunch I see him take a white pill from his pack and wash it down with water from his canteen. My own legs ache from the climb; I too am growing old. But after lunch, Marshall walks with the energy of a young man.

That night at the campfire, Marshall nods as he stares into the flames. The pill has worn off. "We should not be hunting this late in the year," I say to him. "We can still turn back."

"No," he says, just as stubborn as he was as a youth. "The bones predicted success."

"Success in the hunt," I say. "But what are you hunting for?"

He stands, still a tall man, but his shoulders droop. "If you turn back, Sam, I'll go on alone."

"Your daughter—" I begin, wanting to remind him of her danger.

But Kirsten interrupts. "Not alone," she says.

He smiles at her as he turns away, a flash of teeth that makes him look almost young again. Kirsten watches him walk to the shelter and duck inside. "I can take care of myself," she says to me softly. "I fear for my father."

"You do not know how great your danger is," I say. "The spirit will take your body and leave you with nothing."

"I am different from your people. Maybe the spirit will not hurt me," she says. Her eyes are bright, as if with fever, and she does not see the spirit that prowls just outside the circle of light cast by

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the fire. I think for a moment that her eyes start to follow it, but she looks away. She fears to claim her power. "You could go back, Sam," she says.

I shake my head. "Marshall is my blood brother. I will stay by him."

She sits without speaking, watching the flames while the moon rises. "Let me roll the bones," she says when the moon is near the peak of its journey.

"You may not like the answer," I say, but she holds out her hand and I give her the bones.

I chant as she rolls the bones. The bones gleam white in the moonlight: three white sides up—success. The she-bear chuckles and shakes her heavy head in the darkness. Kirsten does not hear. She is studying the bones that lie in the dust. "Success in the hunt," she says. "Now if only I knew what it is I am hunting." She gives me the bones, hesitating as she places them in my hand. "Will you roll the bones, Sam?"

I shake my head. "No. I do not hunt anymore. I do not seek anything."

The next morning, the morning that we hunt the bear, I awaken at dawn. Kirsten is awake. She stands by the burned-out fire and I watch her. She stares at the slope of the mountain above us, her hands clenched into fists at her sides. Beside her, unnoticed, stands the she-bear.

The spirit vanishes when I approach. I touch Kirsten's shoulder, but she does not look at me. Watching her set face, I remember a long-ago dawn when Marshall and I gathered bear brush to burn at the entrance to a she-bear's cave. Beneath his bravado, Marshall had been afraid.

I lift the thong on which the bear claws hang from around my neck and place it around Kirsten's neck. I say, "She cannot touch you now. You are safe."

She raises a hand and runs a finger along the curving length of one claw. Her expression is a strange mixture of fear and anticipation, relief and a kind of regret. "She can't touch me, but what about you?"

"I have hunted the bear before without protection. She does not want me."

"My father—" she begins.

I interrupt. "Your father will not be able to keep you safe from something he does not believe in."

She falls silent for a moment, then says, "I'm afraid for you and

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for my father."

"We will take care of ourselves," I say, and she raises her hand again to touch the bear claw, feeling the sharp tip. Together we gather the bear brush for the fire.

"What did my father find here when he hunted the bear with you?" she asks.

"He found the power of the young warrior. He faced death and found strength in it."

"I wonder what I will find," she mutters.

At breakfast, Marshall is quiet. If he notices the bear claws around his daughter's neck, he does not comment. He checks his rifle once, twice, three times, and tests the edge of his spearhead.

I carry the bundle of bear brush as we climb the granite slope of the mountain, following a path that twists around boulders and through brush. I will light a fire to drive the bear from the cave, and I will stand on one side of the ledge in front of the cave. Marshall will stand—rifle and spear ready—at the other side of the ledge. Kirsten will wait on a ledge above the cave, a rifle in hand.

I follow Marshall along the narrow path to the cave. The ledge in front of the cave mouth is not much larger than the floor of my hut. The ledge ends in a sheer drop; jagged rocks lie below. The wind that swirls in and out of the cave carries the scent of bear and rotting meat.

I build the fire quietly. As I light it, I hear the sound of movement within the cave. I run to my spot, waving to Marshall to tell him: "She is coming," and I whirl to face the entrance, holding my spear ready, for I hear the bear behind me.

As she charges, I dodge to one side, ducking a half-hearted swing of her paw, made as she is turning toward Marshall. He is shouting curses at the beast. The animal is full-grown, almost the size of the bear spirit. Even on all fours, she towers over Marshall. Roaring, the she-bear rises on her hind legs.

The wind changes and the pungent smoke of the bear-brush fire surrounds us.

There is smoke and the roaring of a bear.

There is smoke, there is shouting, there is confusion, there is a gray mist through which I start to step to go to the aid of my blood brother.

But the mist becomes solid. The she-bear spirit stands before me, blocking my path. She swats at me with a paw, and I duck back; but I am on the edge of the cliff, and there is nowhere to run. She grins at me as she rears back on her hind legs.

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"Sam!" I hear a shout from above. The spirit looks up and the bear claws that Kirsten throws rattle against the stone beside me. Even before I snatch them up, the spirit is gone. I turn and see the girl-woman on the ledge above me, facing a shadow that looms far over her.

Marshall shouts and I look to him. The bear has him. He is on the edge of the cliff. His rifle lies several feet away and he holds only his spear. As the bear swings a paw at him, he thrusts with the spear, missing but ducking away from the bear's sweeping blow. He smiles as he did when he was young—old eyes burning with the flame of a warrior. Joyous. The wrinkles are gone from his cheeks; his eyes are clear. I start toward him, then hesitate in the face of his smile.

From the ledge above, I hear Kirsten's voice. She calls to me in the Old Tongue, in a voice of power that stops me. She grins down at me. I can see both in her eyes: woman and bear. Large spirit. Sometimes vindictive, sometimes generous, sometimes angry, sometimes compassionate.

I look to Marshall. Kirsten could shoot now. The she-bear within her could turn the bear away from her father. Marshall shouts curses at the animal and thrusts again with the spear. He wears the face of a man meeting death as he wants to meet it. The bear towers above him, hesitating.

Sometimes compassionate.

The bear's paw sweeps down in a mighty blow that catches Marshall and tumbles him off the cliff. Even as he falls and the bear turns away, Kirsten is scrambling down from her ledge, almost falling herself, stumbling, almost running. She rushes down the slide of loose rock to the base of the cliff, slipping with the shifting talus, almost falling, catching herself—clumsy, quick, powerful, graceful woman-girl-bear-woman. I follow more slowly, picking my way down the slope.

Kirsten stands over her father's body, fists clenched. A thin trickle of blood flows from a scrape on her arm where she fell against a boulder. She looks up when I approach and I see the wild flicker in her eyes: woman-bear-girl-bear. "I could have stopped the bear," her voice stammers softly. "I met the spirit and she . . . and I . . . we . . ." She growled in the Old Tongue the word for merging, for union, for when two streams join to form a river. The spirit has not overpowered her; they have become one: one woman-bear, one bear-woman. "I knew then that I could stop . . ." Words catching, halting, beginning again. "I could have . . . but it was better that . . . better,

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but I could have stopped . . ." Her eyes fill with tears, but the wild changes—woman-bear-girl-bear—do not stop, and her fists do not relax.

I reach out and touch her shoulder, and the tears spill over. For a moment a fearful child, Marshall's only daughter, peers from the blue pools where she mourns her father and says, "He's dead, Sam. Do you think he wanted to die?" Tears spill, and she kneels by her father's battered head. I stand with my hand on her shoulder; I understand now why she had been afraid of her power. With the power, she had been able to help her father find what he sought. I understand, but that changes nothing.

We leave the bear claws around his neck, and we leave his rifle and his spear at his side. We build him a cairn, Kirsten and I, rolling and carrying rocks to surround him, to pile over him, to keep back the animals, and to protect him. I do not know who I will see each time I look at Kirsten: woman, bear, or girl-child.

When we finish, Kirsten stands over the mound of rocks. Her hands are scratched and bruised, but they are relaxed now. "I wonder if he truly wanted what he found here, Sam." Her voice is puzzled and wondering. "I wonder if he is happy now."

We make the journey back to my hut in two days; and as we walk, she becomes at ease with herself and the forest, moving quietly. Her eyes are wise and calm. She tells me I must continue to wear the bear claws around my neck, but I cannot tell whether the woman speaks or the bear. Perhaps both. She is my friend.

She speaks the Old Tongue, and the birds and the beasts listen. We dine on fish that she calls to her from the stream edge. She hears the voice of the wind and the rattling complaints of the bones of the earth.

But her quiet eyes betray her greatest strength: she is no longer afraid of her power. I do not know what she will do when she leaves my valley. What strange fishes will she call forth in the Outside? Will she ask the earth to tremble and the winds to blow a hurricane gale? Will she fill the cities with beasts? Or will she watch the humans and laugh: large, compassionate, sometimes generous, sometimes vindictive.

I do not know what the shaman-woman-bear-girl-child will do.

At my hut, she turns toward the Outside. When she lifts her pack I touch her shoulder and say, "Fortune go with you, Kirsten."

She smiles tentatively. It is a small smile, but it carries hints of great wickedness, hints of great joy and great sorrow.

"Did I do right, Sam?" she asks.

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"You did what you had to do," I say. "You did well."

"Can I come back to visit, Sam?" she asks and I can see the girl-child peering from her eyes.

"Come back whenever you wish, my friend," I say, and lift my hand in farewell.

She walks toward the Outside, casting a shadow larger than herself.

HEINLEIN'S STORIES

Far-faring, star-faring,
Robert A. Heinlein, sir,
Please tell more stories of
Men who are strong
And of those well-endowed,
Ultradesirable
Women—the kind who make
Lazarus Long.

—Poul Anderson

CLAUSIUS' CHAOS

Entropy, Shmentropy,
Rudolph J. Clausius
Proved universally
Chaos will show
Increase in processes
Thermodynamical.
Something that housekeepers
Already know.

—Poul Anderson

SECOND SOLUTION TO ROBOTS OF OZ (from page 67)

The abbreviation of Pennsylvania is PA. Assuming that the alphabet is cyclical, so that A and Z are joined, shifting each letter in PA *back* one step also arrives at OZ!

Dot and Tot of Merryland was the first fantasy novel Baum wrote after the huge success of his *Wizard of Oz*. Can you think of a plausible reason why he named the girl and boy heroes of this novel Dot and Tot? For a possible answer, see page 169.

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THE SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR
by Erwin S. Strauss

October is wall-to-wall with SF con(vention)s. Check out a social weekend with your favorite SF authors, artists, editors and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. The hotline is (703) 273-6111. If my machine answers, leave your name, area code and number SLOWLY. I'll call you back. When writing cons, enclose an SASE. When calling them, give your name and reason for calling right away. Look for me at cons, making music as Filthy Pierre.

ImaginItzaCon. For info, write: **Brown, 3211 Trezevant, Memphis TN 38107.** Or phone: **(901) 274-8894** (10 AM to 10 PM only, not collect). Con will be held in Memphis TN (if location omitted, same as in address) on: 26-28 Sep., 1980. Guests will include: Robert (Another Fine Myth, Bug Wars) Asprin, Sven Carlberg. Follow-on to JustImagiCon in 1979.

Intervention. (801) 355-8076. Salt Lake City, UT, 26-28 Sep. Marion Zimmer (Darkover) Bradley, Orson Scott Card, Michael C. Goodwin, Victoria Poyser, Second annual edition.

ArmadilloCon. (512) 477-8218. Austin TX, 3-5 Oct. Gardner (Strangers) Dozois, Chad Oliver, Neil Barrett Jr., Ed Bryant, Leigh Kennedy, Geo. R. R. Martin, Lisa Tuttle. H. Waldrop.

RoVaCon. (703) 389-9400. Roanoke VA, 10-11 Oct. Frederik (Jem) Pohl, Frank Kelly Freas, Elizabeth Taylor Warner, Paul Dellinger. Mrs. Warner will present scholarships in drama.

NonCon. (403) 469-0719. Edmonton, Alta., Canada, 10-12 Oct. Vonda (Deamsnake) McIntyre.

OctoCon. (707) 544-5959. Santa Rosa CA, 11-12 Oct. This is a major new Western convention.

RocKon. (501) 568-0938. Little Rock AR, 17-19 Oct. A. J. Offutt, Jo Clayton, D. & N. Lynch.

WindyCon, Box 2572, Chicago IL 60690. 24-26 Oct. Robert Sheckley, Gardner Dozois, Wilson *Arthur (Bob) Tucker. This is usually the biggest convention of the year in the Midwest.*

MileHiCon, Box 27074, Denver CO 80277. 24-26 Oct. Stephen (Covenant the Unbeliever) Donaldson, Ed Bryant, Roy Tackett. Many of the same folks who'll bring you Denvention next year.

MapleCon, Box 2912 Sta. D, Ottawa, Ont. K1P 5W9, Canada. (613) 745-5009. 24-26 Oct. Gordon (Dorsai) Dickson, Jan Howard Finder. SF and comics con.

FenQuest, Lot 3, Country Sq. Ct., Allegany NY 14706. (716) 372-6814. 24-26 Oct. Weekend-long, live-action, role-play game. Call soon for role assignment. Costume optional. Prizes.

World Fantasy Con, 239 N. 4th, Columbia PA 17512. (717) 684-3935. Baltimore MD, 31 Oct.-2 Nov. Jack Vance, Boris Vallejo, Robert Bloch. The WorldCon for the serious fantasy fan. At the Hunt Valley Inn, north of the city of Edgar Allan Poe, who'll be honored there.

HallowCon, c/o Rim of Starlight, 160 Foster Rd., Lake Ronkonkoma NY 11779. Hempstead NY, 31 Oct.-2 Nov. A Star Trek/SF con, if the World Fantasy Con is too heavy for your taste.

SciCon, c/o Tyrrell, 414 Winterhaven Dr., Newport News VA 23606. 7-9 Nov. M. W. Wellman.

PhilCon, c/o Lawler, 2750 Narcissa Rd., Plymouth Meeting PA 19462. Philadelphia PA, 14-16 Nov., 1980. Bova, Freas, Sheckley. The oldest con, back home in downtown Philly again.

WesterCon 34, Box 161719, Sacramento CA 95816. Held over the July 4th weekend in 1981.

Denvention II, Box 11545, Denver CO 80211. 3-7 Sep., 1981. C. L. Moore, Clifford Simak, Rusty Hevelin, Ed Bryant. The 1981 WorldCon. It's not too early to start planning summer vacations.

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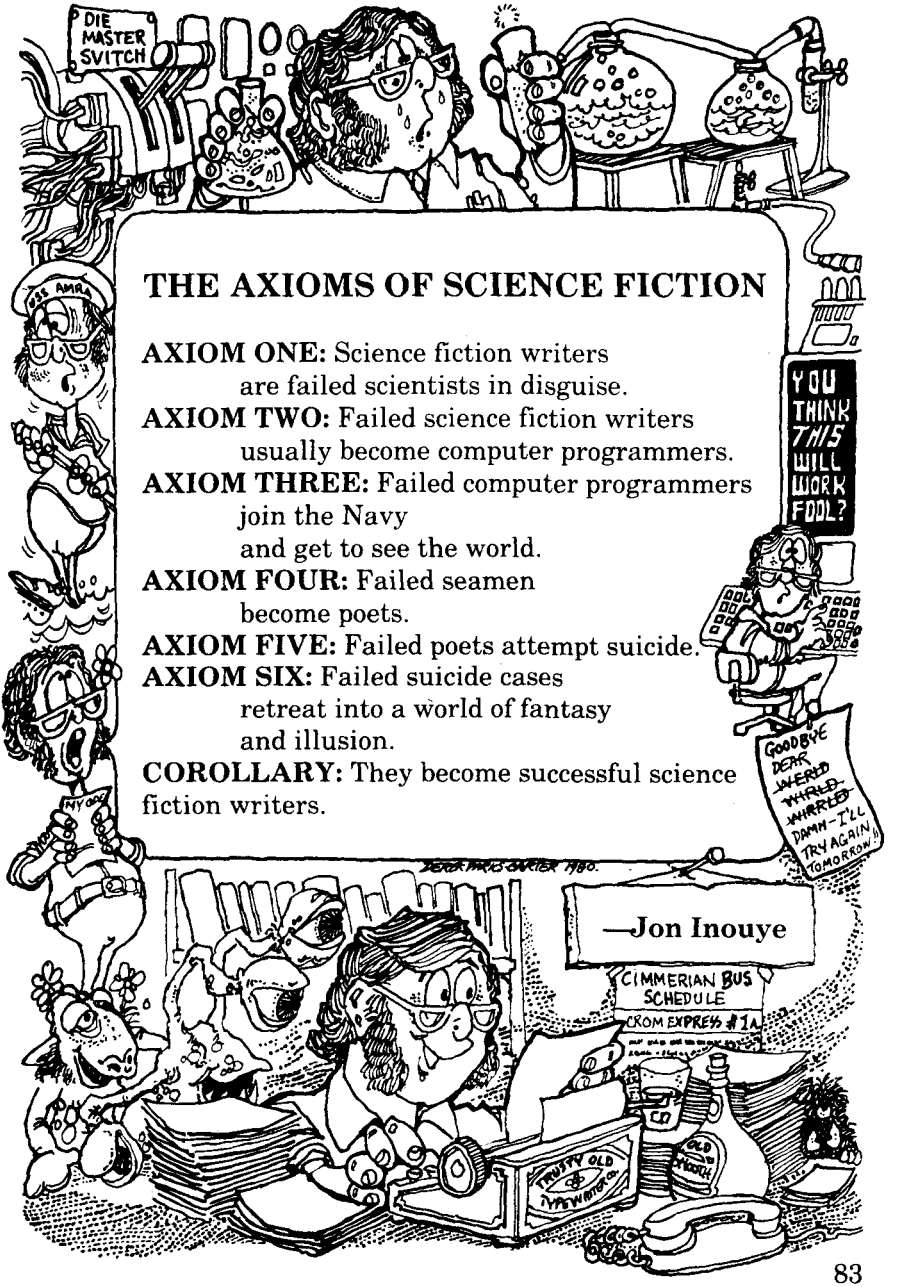
DIE MASTER SVITCH
YOU THINK THIS WILL WORK FOOL?
GOODBYE DEAR WHIRLED WHIRLED DAMN - I'LL TRY AGAIN TOMORROW
—Jon Inouye
CIMMERIAN BUS SCHEDULE
CROM EXPRESS #1
TRUSTY OLD TYPEWRITER
OLD MOUTH

THE AXIOMS OF SCIENCE FICTION

AXIOM ONE: Science fiction writers
are failed scientists in disguise.
AXIOM TWO: Failed science fiction writers
usually become computer programmers.
AXIOM THREE: Failed computer programmers
join the Navy
and get to see the world.
AXIOM FOUR: Failed seamen
become poets.
AXIOM FIVE: Failed poets attempt suicide.
AXIOM SIX: Failed suicide cases
retreat into a world of fantasy
and illusion.
COROLLARY: They become successful science fiction writers.

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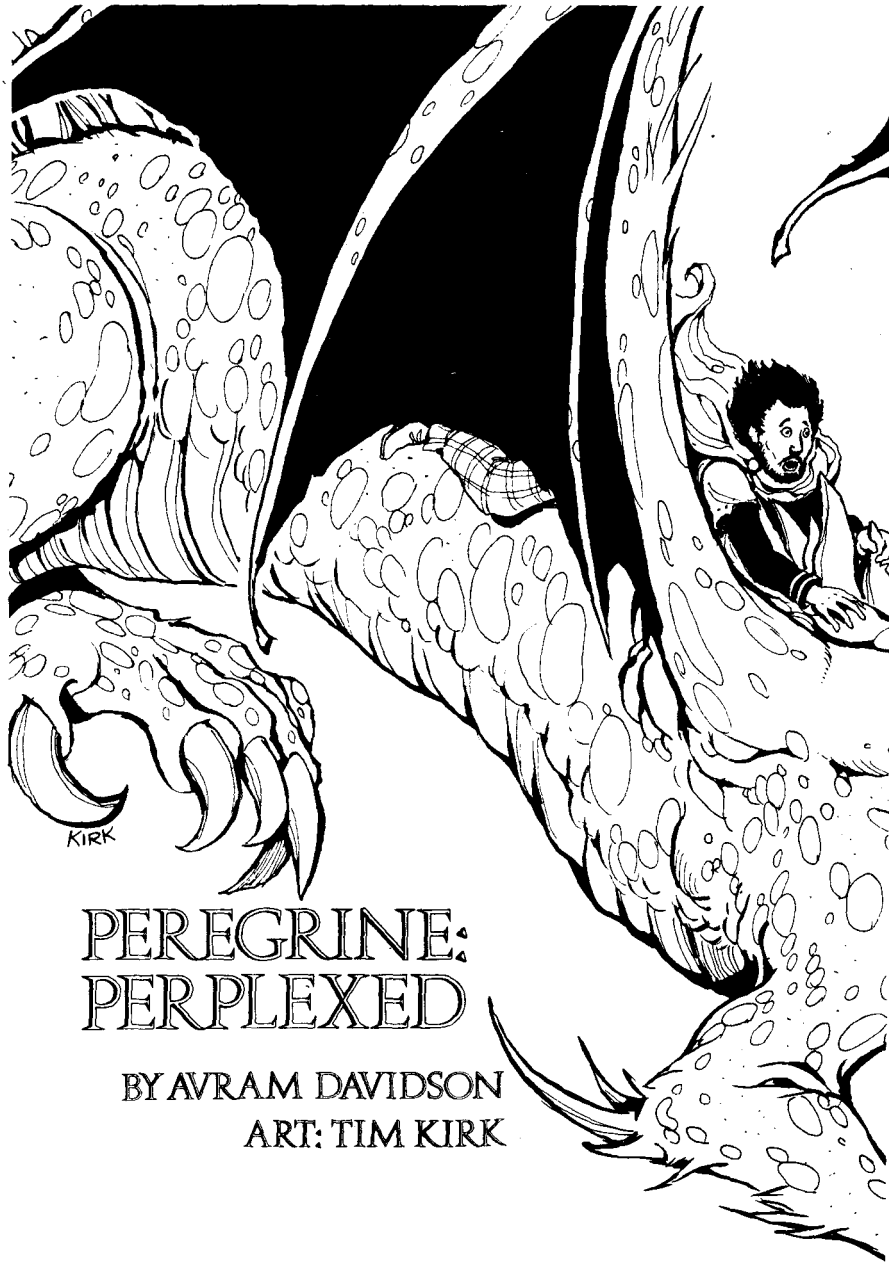

PEREGRINE: PERPLEXED

BY AVRAM DAVIDSON
ART: TIM KIRK

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The author, Avram Davidson, was born on 23 April 1923 (birthday of Wm. Shakespeare, James Buchanan, and Sanford B. Dole, who was President of the Republic of Hawaii). He served in World War II as a U.S. Naval Corpsman with the Fifth Marines in Okinawa and China. Mr. Davidson is the author of The Phoenix and the Mirror, Ursus of Ultima Thule, The Island under the Earth, The Enquiries of Doctor Esterhazy, *and* Peregrine: Primus. *In the early 1960s he was the Editor of* The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, *"during which time," an Australian critic once wrote, "the art of blurb-writing was raised to new heights, but nothing much else seemed to happen."*

Mr. Davidson has won the Hugo, the Edgar, the Howard, and the Queens' Awards (among previous winners of this last: William Faulkner). He is said to have survived two wars, two hurricanes, two typhoons, and two collaborations with Harlan Ellison, but who listens? Mr. Davidson was formerly married to the writer Grania Davis. He himself has been Writer in Residence to the University of Washington and the College of William and Mary in Virginia, Spring Visiting Lecturer at the University of California in Irvine, and Visiting Distinguished Writer at the University of Texas. He says of "Peregine: Perplexed" (which forms a part of Peregrine: Secundus, *sequel to* P.: Primus*), "All of the Umbrian words and some of the English ones are to be found in a massive work of immense scholarship,* The Bronze Tablets of Iguvium, *by James Wilson Poultney, published in 1959 by the American Philological Society, Baltimore, none of whom are in any way responsible for the use which Mr. Davidson has made of this material."*

The author adds: "I must be one of the few living men who has sailed under a letter of marque, been shipwrecked on a desert island, and lunched with a eunuch in China." Mr. Davidson has a white beard and is very modest.

> Hours and days and months and years go by; the past returns no more, and what is to be we cannot know; but whatever the time gives us in which to live, we should therefore be content.
>
> —Horace (or maybe Cicero)

The Emperor of the East was also perplexed. Should he support, in the chariot races, the teams of the *Blues*, or of the *Greens*? One was Orthodox, one was Monophysite; in making either choice he risked riot, rebellion, and crown; often the Emperor of the East could

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not remember which side was which, anyway.

"Know a good *horse* when I see one, though," he would say, wistfully. And much good *that* did him.

The Emperor of the West was also perplexed. The Ostrogoths and the Vandals were, each, separately, threatening to sack Rome unless he paid them, each, separately, a hundred thousand pounds of gold: he only *had* thirty thousand. Perhaps, he thought, he would blow it all on a nice marble tomb with inscriptions describing himself as *Conqueror of the Vandals and the Ostrogoths*—none of whom could read anyway.

As for the Emperor of the Midst . . . Ambrosius Lucianus had there and then most recently been proclaimed; and he had followed the distribution of the customary donations (from the Captains of the Guards down to the Inspectors of Water Mains and Sewer Drains) with the pronouncement of a doctrine the most bizarre of which anyone had anywhere, at any time, ever heard, *videlicet: Complete Freedom of Religion.* This new policy was bound to bring peace to the Central Roman Empire. Only maybe not: Pagan and Neo-Pagan, Jew and Christian and Heretic (Gnostic, Agnostic, or otherwise), paused in The Bath and Forum and Agora and looked at each other, baffled. "Either I am right or you are right or you are right or *you* are right: this is obvious. And whosoever is right (although this is of course mere rhetoric, for of course *I* am right!) is he who holds the truth; and it is the most commonplace bit of logic in the world, which every child can understand and even he who runs may read, that Truth owes no tolerance to error. . . ."

But there were of course those who cared for none of these things, and who simply came briskly into their offices, sat down briskly at their desks, briskly unrolled their maps and said to their associates and their subordinates, "Now here is where the ancient sacrifices have been suppressed and here is where they are now to be revived, for the good of the State, the good of the Imperium, for Piety and Patriotism, and all the rest of it: you see: Here. And here. And *here.*"

Briskly.

Gaspar the Dreamer—he who controlled the realm of dreams in a certain part of the world—was not perplexed.

Not yet.

As the troops and court and camp followers of the High King of East Brythonia came clumping in through the Nigh Gate of Alfland High Town, Peregrine was making with all deliberate haste out of

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Alfland High Town via the Aft Gate. He had, he thought, set up sufficient diversion to cover the escape of himself and his friends; but to have remained and checked on the success of his stratagem would have defeated the whole purpose of it. Either the Mitred Protopresbyter of Alvish East Brythonia, and his pious parishioners, believing (as Peregrine had intended they should) that the incomers were indeed a group of Schismatic Arians maintaining the diabolical doctrine that "One presbyter may ordain another presbyter," would either subdue and send them flying back the way they came, thus permitting the King of the Alves and his handful of followers time to make a clean getaway, or . . . or he would not. And *they* would not.

In which case—

But Peregrine preferred not to dwell upon in which case.

Someone in the Royal Entourage had of a sudden recollected this as an old short-cut: but no one in the Royal Entourage had recollected that Peregrine, having never passed this way in his life before, had no way of recollecting it as such. No one even thought to pause and leave for him a signal such as a broken branch or a line of pebbles.

No one even thought of anything . . . except, of course, escape.

Escape from the High King, who would, upon learning (as almost at once he would) that the Treasure (including the Taxes) had been stolen by a dragon . . . by any dragon . . . or by any other means . . . would at once begin to demonstrate that the only thing which distinguished his own lack of grace under pressure from that of the nastier Roman Emperors was his own absolute lack of class or style. . . .

No one would be dipped in tar and burnt alive: tar was expensive. No one would be fed to maddened lions: lions were *dam*nably expensive, maddened or otherwise. But anybody might of course be impaled, for the cost of a sharpened pole was minimal: and anybody of course might be plonked into a dungeon and there left to starve to death: which cost, of course, and therein lay its beauty, *nothing at all!*

Hence the haste of King Alf. And all the rest of them.

The speed in spooring possessed by the wise Athenian mentioned in the Talmud, who was able at a glance to adduce that there had passed along the way a she-camel such-and-such-a-number of months great with calf, blind in one eye, and carrying oil in one pack and we forget exactly what in the other—this skill was not Peregrine's.

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As swift as he could, he followed the road.

And it was, with all its wendings and its windings, a very long, long road indeed.

It was not any common thing for any petty king to avoid the annual visitation of, and set meeting with, his overlord and high king. It was, however, not unknown. It was, however, unknown for such a reason, *videlicet* that the petty king's carelessness had allowed a dragon (Smaragderos by name) to steal the treasury: but although no dragon had ever before stolen a treasury, still, treasuries had been stolen before. The High King of East Brythonia could not, certainly, excuse such conduct: on the part of the dragon, it constituted malfeasance; and on the part of the Petty King of the Alves, it constituted *mis*feasance.

Therefore, that the misfeasant king should have gone to chase after the malfeasant dragon (Smaragderos by name) was understandable. But there was more to this than the High King could easily understand.

And the "more" in this case was . . . *Peregrine*. . . .

The High King of East Brythonia could not excuse such conduct.

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"Afore they cut an' run," demanded His Highness, Bryon of Brythonia East; " 'oo'd been 'ere?" The question was all but pro forma; the answer was, if not entirely satisfactory, swift: The King of the Alves, his Queen, the two princesses, the one prince, and the one other petty king, a visitor not involved in the matter of the missing treasure; and, also, one other guest.

What one other guest?

"Peregrine . . . a son of a king . . . young . . . slender . . . dark and comely. . . ."

At once High King Bryon's large, hairy, dirty ears pricked up. He knew where each and every Petty King and the heirs of same, in East Brythonia, were supposed at the moment to be; and he could bring to mind no son of a king, and certainly of no such description, who was intended to be present in Alfland; he could rack his brain in vain for any who might even be suspected of being present.

"Peregrine, son of a king," and of a king unknown? It was all puzzling, baffling, mystifying.

And so, of course, dangerous. Very, very dangerous.

Bryon had growled, had shouted, had sought further information. One small bit was supplied.

" 'E wore a green tunical, and trews wi' a great brown check h'awoven h'inter 'um, may it save Your 'Ighness."

"Much that tells me," growled Bryon High King. For a moment more he sat grumbling and casting his eyes low about the cluttered mucky courtyard: then his eyes and he himself all together rose.

He looked—he glared, rather—at the Baron Bruno Grumpit, his brother-in-law (the sister-and-wife who united them in whatsoever law it was, not regarded by either, was not part of the procession; she was back home plucking geese, quite content that neither of the main men in her life were paying her attentions, for no pleasures had she ever got from the attentions of either of them)—the Baron was his Next-at-Arms—

Now, whilst the High King's men had come sloping and slouching into Alf High Town, expecting no more than the usual country fare and fornication by way of refreshment, the Baron himself riding before his men and casting his eyes all round (for he suspected everything, everywhere, anyplace, anytime) he saw at the far end of a leafy lane a younger man than he by far, alone, on a lumbering horse. The Baron could read letter in no language, but the Baron's eyes were keener than any other man's.

And his ears, sharper.

At the same time as he saw the younger man he heard a girl, one

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in early womanhood say, "*There he goes! That is him!*" and the mere tone of her voice did bad things to him, for no woman in any stage of womanhood had ever spoken to, or, he was sure (and rightly sure) *of*, he himself, in such a tone. And another girl's voice, young and fresh and clear, said one word.

"*Peregrine . . .*"

And the Baron had marked in the one instant that the figure who swiftly entered and left his line of sight at the end of the lane was young . . . slender . . . dark and comely . . . and clad in a green tunical, and in trews with a great brown check woven into them. Somehow, the Baron did not (in what he had in place of what most men had for minds) at the moment realize everything he saw, heard, felt: not all in that one moment. But . . . Now . . .

Now the High King Bryon glared at him, and said, sunken mouth twitching, "Take five men. Go. Follow." The orders of the said High King to him were commonly succinct; for one thing, in matters purely (or impurely) military he knew . . . and loved it not . . . that the Baron Bruno had the better skill; thus, did the Baron in despite of scant orders do well, he had but obeyed and so earned no praise; for another, did the Baron in despite of scant orders do ill, then Bryon could not blame himself.

The Emperor was far, far away, and no one else, of course, could blame Bryon.

Not openly.

Who now added almost before he had finished his first words, "What! You are still 'ere? *Harms! 'Orse! Presue! Fetch! Begorn!*"

The Baron lowered his heavy eyes, set his heavy jaws still more heavily together, looked round for five good (which is to say, *bad*) men, beckoned with his mailed fist. In his hoarse voice he said, after as brief a formal obeisance as he dared, "*March!*"

The hornsman sounded something inarticulate, the two horsemen clattered forward but—carefully—not too far forward—the foot clumped behind, dragging their pikes, yawning, cursing low, spitting and farting and scratching their armpits; all casting sidelong looks when they passed any woman (or even boy) rash enough to be still abroad. Though one pike did not drag: it bore a banneret with a clenched fist painted on it.

For the Petty King of Alfland, the Baron felt about as much as he felt for the roach which scuttles away across the floor: a certain desire to crush it: no more. But slowly now for Peregrine the Baron had been developing a different feeling altogether. For Peregrine was young and the Baron had once been young but Peregrine was

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also comely and also admired and the Baron had never been comely and never at any hour had he ever been admired by any. Some to be sure did envy him. But of all shadows of admiration, envy is the least. And . . . it was said . . . Peregrine was the son of a king, though of which king it was not said: of none *he* had ever known, the Baron was sure. *A king!* The Baron was no king's son, though, supposedly, he was *some* man's son. Miles more important, though: he was the High King's brother-in-law.

The Baron was at all times incapable of putting himself in another's place, save of course that he was at all times capable of putting himself in the High King's place and he knew what *he* would do an *he* were High King and this other one—the Baron—did dare make one, *one* move for the throne; and so knowing this the Baron did not dare make that one move—

Among the High King's subjects were those who might otherwise dare help those who might help remove from the throne the man who squatted on it like a mangy wolf: but who did not, would not: because they knew that while the Baron lived the throne was potentially the Baron's if ever the High King left it or was at all weakened whilst yet upon it. Gold, they knew, would stay the High King. But it was in their minds and hearts that nothing at all would stay the Baron.

And this was the man who now followed after Peregrine, while Peregrine fled fast.

The High King at length, and followed by his followers, sallied out of Alf Town High House, to show his power. Thus it was that the Grand Army of East Brythonia, its High King and High Court, and its Grand Chaplain, came marching *south* along the Paved Street at the same time as the Mitred (and, perhaps, who knows, and who knew how soon? *martyred*) Protopresbyter of Alvish East Brythonia, his cure and flock, came marching *north*. Now: had Baron Bruno, the High King's brother-in-law and ex-officio C. in C., been the first in his line of march, short work would have been made of any and all who did not instantly fling themselves face downward crying the good old (and, but one must whisper this) originally pagan cry of, "O High King, live forever!" (doctrinally dubious, of course, else the entire study of eschatology may go for nought)—but protocol, to say nothing of the High King, forbade such precedence. Also: had the Mitred Protopresbyter's right-hand man, in private life a short-tempered boss butcher, been first in *his* line of march—

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However.

The two archpriests—Grand Chaplain and Mitred Protopresbyter—at once recognized each other as a member of an opposite side at many and many a Church Council: they had exchanged words at the Council of Cappadocia, they had split hairs at the Council of Boeotia, they had—for once, and only for once—joined at the Council of Babylonia Philadelphia, in flinging cathedrae at those putting forth the damnable doctrine of Justification by Good Works, i.e. Works of Corporal Mercy. Local loyalties at once went for nothing, and present politics for less than nothing.

The Grand Chaplain dismounted from his mule and—though only on one knee—genuflected before the Mitred Protopresbyter. The Mitred Protopresbyter lifted his mitre with both hands—though only one inch—and, replacing it, aspersed the Grand Chaplain. The niceties had been observed. Now *to* it.

"Clement of Alexandria," began the Grand Chaplain.

"Theophilus of Antioch," began the Mitred Protopresbyter.

Everyone relaxed. It might all end in bloodshed yet. But yet was not yet. There was, after all, nothing, *nothing*, like a nice, good long theological argument. The local throng now offered the invaders first-fruits and other fresh produce. The soldiery offered the citizenry salt pickles and crisp biscuits. Even the High King, though he bit his long and filthy nails and growled a bit, even he accepted a sliced cold melon from the local fruit-merchant, and cocked his rather dirty ear to the sacred discourse.

"Perpetual damnation without preamble or Purgatory," from one of the archpriests.

"Occasional and intermittant respite and refreshment, by Grace, of those in torment," from one of the others.

The High King slurped his sliced cold melon; when it was gone he reached out for another. The missing Treasure might be somewhere and then again it might be somewhere else: where it was, was not certain. The missing Petty King and Petty Court might be making good their escape; then again they might not be making good their escape: what they might be doing was not certain.

"And it is written, 'Where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched'—"

"And where is it written, 'But their worm never dieth, and their fire is never quenched'—?"

Only one thing, after all, was absolutely certain, let this rabble and any other rabble shout their *Live forevers* till their throats went dry; only one thing was utterly certain. *All men are mortal. All men*

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must die.

The High King sat upon his horse. And he listened. And he stayed.

After what seemed a very long time, Peregrine had to concede that he heard nothing whatsoever ahead of him anymore: no tlot-tlot, no tramp-tramp, no murmurs of hush, no inadvertent sounds such as all but the most disciplined of troop must e'en sometimes make; not even a whinny or a neigh.

He halted his horse.

The horse at once moved over to the berm of the road and began to graze.

All was silent.

And, still, Peregrine heard nothing.

Some scent, he thought it must be, some scent remembered from early childhood, honeysuckle perhaps, or hawthorne or acacia, overwhelmed him, and, mixed with so many other childhood sensual reflections—the smell of the rank weed and grass crushed by the horse's hooves—and, indeed, the smell of the horse itself, *don't thee be afeared now Perry for Dada has ahold o' thee*, and the very feel of the animal between his legs (for most of the trip so far he'd had little time to allow for reflections on such like) . . . and other sounds and such from childhood began to rise up on all sides, as the humming of sundry insects and the buzzing of bees, Nnnnnnnnn . . . Whshshshhh . . . the very leaves of the trees began to whisper to him, as in days of old, as in former years . . . perry perry listen listen: so the sounds seemed to say . . . hadn't, in his childhood, when all was fresh, all innocent, all there for him, hadn't sounds in the seas of trees seemed to say that to him? Yes they had. And what else had they seemed to say?

He let himself be swept away by Memory, sweet sister, or was it sweet daughter of . . . perry perry listen listen listen perry child go not upon this road much further and neither turn back the way of coming, for—

What?

He had no childhood memory of *these* words at all.

Not at *all.*

But, and in but a second more, he realized: it was *now* that he was hearing this! In his childhood, indeed he had heard the voices in the woods speaking to him, with their *Perry, Perry, listen, Perry.* But then they had said other things to him, and what they had said to him then was one thing, and what they were saying now was another. Quite another. "I hear you and I am listening," he said

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now. Aloud, yes. But not very loud. It was not necessary to speak very loud.

Not to the dryads, who spoke to him now from every shrub and tree.

From almost every . . .

A deeper hum and thrum and rustle now took up the theme: and he recognized this one, too. The Man in the Oak . . .

"Peregrine, we speak to thee and thou canst hear us, for we perceive that thine ears have not been estopped against our voices; there is that sheen about thee which sheweth us that the waters have not been cast upon thee, that thou hast not been immersed in those waters which close the ears of man and child and woman against us forever."

And he, Peregrine, acknowledged that it was true. "I am a heathen still," he said. "A child of the wild heath. And I hear you and I listen."

The dryads repeated their soft, sweet murmur. "*Listen, listen, listen, Perry, child, go not upon this road much further and neither turn back the way of coming, for there is danger ahead as there is danger behind. . . .*"

And the bees made their solemn oath and affirmation, with their solemn sound and note of *Nnnnnnnnnn* . . .

"I have heard, listened, and believed," he said. "What, then, am I to—"

The dryads, half-saying, half-singing: "*We shall ask our bigger brother . . .*"

The Man in the Oak, with his deeper thrum and rustle and hum, made reply: "*And I shall ask mine elder brother . . .*"

From an even more immense tree now came an even deeper, droning voice. "*Sister Dryads, Brother Oak, Peregrine kinsman, I be thy Brother Beech, who, being asked, must answer. Peregrine: long ago, how long ago I cannot say, but many snows and many springs ago it was, and many wolves have whelped, and it may be even that I saw the oliphant beneath my boughs, who has gone, ah long has the oliphant gone from beneath my boughs from one horizon to the other; but I grow prolix; I must be brief: on a day long, long ago came men and cut my sister down—*" The dryads keened and sob-sobbed a moment; then their sound became subdued; the beech tree, towering high above them all, resumed: "*—and cut my sister down, and of her substance many things they made, the usages of which I wot not for the most part: but this I know: of her heart they made certain boards and worked them smooth—for this was before even*

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the days when men made tablets and inlaid them with wax—and on these boards, Peregrine my kith (for thou wast begotten beneath a beechen tree, didst thou this know? It matters not, but—), upon these boards made of my Sister Beech—"

And, suddenly, there burst upon Peregrine's mind and burst from out his lips, words which he had heard before, and had wondered on, and had then—till now—forgotten:

" '*Beware the boards of beechwood with the baleful signs!*' "

And all the trees then swayed, and every bough bowed *Yes*.

And every bough bowed *Yes*.

Ambrosius Lucianus, Emperor of the Midst, having assumed the Diadem and Purple (and with them also the traditional names of Augustus Hadrian Nerva Constans Maximin Trajan, and so on and SO on . . . "Caesar" being understood), had issued as one of his first edicts that all religious ceremonies were legal, whatsoever—save those involving human sacrifice and human castration—at once ceased to be known by most of those nobly-assumed names. Christians called him Ambrose the Apostate, and Pagans referred to him as Lucian the Liberator. And, among the many, *many* results of his edict and decree was that once again lots were to be drawn to select the members of the College of Priests to officiate at the ever-so-ancient Iguvine Games; these were not really and had not for donkeys' ages actually been games in any but the most archaically dubious sense of the word: in fact, they were not actually being performed in Old Iguvium at all, for Old Iguvium lay in Old Umbria, and this was still within the domain and dominion of the Emperor of the West. In the realm of the Emperor of the Midst lay *New* Iguvium, in *New* Umbria, and New Umbria was an ancient old Umbrian colony which had from ancient times offered its annual sacrifices according to the ancient Umbrian customs; said customs requiring the presence of a two-man college of priests.

Such priests had of course to be of noble blood and of the aristocracy (true, the once razor-sharp lines dividing Patricians from Knights was now a thing of the past . . . particularly in the Central, or Middle, Roman Empire), they had each to possess all four limbs and all twenty digits (the nice point, would one be eligible who had more than twenty digits?, had never ever been settled; and, almost certainly, now never would be), and one penis and two testicles—each—and they, of course, had, of course, to be able to perform the ceremony in Umbrian. Umbrian, like Oscan, was an Italic tongue akin to Latin: but it *was not* Latin . . .

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. . . and it was almost extinct.

In fact: it was doubtful if there were now more than four potential candidates who could count past four in Umbrian, even upon their fingers; however, the decree had gone forth that the ceremonies were to be performed and the sacrifices to be held, and so four elderly knights had turned out to draw lots to see which two would go and hold them.

They were to be known, according to the old law and custom, as the Sacred Brothers: and the elder was to be the Brother-Superior. —*Or*, if one preferred: the Elder Brother.

Free snacks were always available on the occasion of such selections, there was of course the privilege of serving the immortal gods (rather, of late, having been rather officially neglected), there was of course, the honor of the thing; and there was, in addition, the official perquisites, consisting of a bushel of golden emmerrods, a peck of gold mice, three gold rings and a silver tassy apiece . . . and sundry other items, all of a most valuable and a most eclectic nature.

This was the first time in recent years that the lots had been drawn with any much expectation that the twain chosen would be allowed actually to travel to Nova Umbria in expectation of actually holding and performing the ceremonies. *However*. One of the four candidates was quite obviously senile and kept wiping his nose upon his *toga praetexta*, and one had had to be carried to the polling place in his potty-chair—he was still mentally alert enough but his physical infirmity *did* raise questions—

And so, really, there were only *two*. . . .

Now, new religions, in newly-civilized regions, might find insoluble the problems of four people drawing lots for an exercise of which only two were patently capable: but round about the Tideless and Innermost and Circumfluent Seas were cults too old and too sophisticated for that: an experienced præstidigitator always held the lot-box: when one of the undesired candidates dipped in his hand, the conjuror simply and deftly slipped him a black-ball.

The returns were, not unexpectedly, as desired. Or, anyway, as desired by those in charge. Which is, in the long run, very much the same thing.

And so: "Chosen thereby to serve the immortal gods in the capacity of Brothers of the Sacred College of Priests in New Iguvium," announced the selectoral officer, "are: the Right Honorable Senator Sir Rufus Tiburnus, Pat., Kt., Senatus Publiusque Romanum Proconsul (Ret.) . . . *and*. . ." He made a feint of consulting his tablets. ". . . the Right Honorable Senator Sir Zosimus Sulla, Pat., Kt., Sen-

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atusconsultum de Bacchanalibus (Ret.)." Here he hesitated. *Was* there supposed to be a ritual mumble of *absit omen* at this point? He gazed, in some perplexity, at a bust of the Divine Guphus, a deservedly obscure Emperor. Being one of the rare officials who had risen to office by tact rather than treachery, he solved the matter very admirably: he sneezed. Everybody at once mumbled *absit omen* . . . except for one newly-naturalized citizen and new-made knight, a former petty king from out the Gothic North or East, who mumbled something which sounded like *gezundtheit*, but which of course was not.

". . . may the gods send thee good victims and auspicious signs," the official continued smoothly, running through the rest of the general formulae; then, coming to what someone (perhaps one of the two selected) was heard to refer to, not too *sotto voce*, as *the point*: "Litters will be provided, and change of horses and/or mules at all Imperial posting-stops, plus daily fodder, and allowances for the servants, whether free-born or freed, slave, serf or thrall, *and*," and here he looked around him with an air of one who has wrought well; "and all this and the maintenance of the Collegiate Priests shall be equal to that of those of the rank of Caesar; *salve adque vale*, the Rev. Sir Rufus Tiburnus and *salve adque vale*, the Rev. Sir Zosimus Sulla . . . the wine . . . the water . . . the libations . . . the refreshments . . . and the free souvenirs for the august candidates who were on this occasion not selected to be chosen by the immortal gods. . . ."

"Not bad arrangements, what?" said the Rev. Sir Zosimus Sulla to the Rev. Sir Rufus Tiburnus. ("Reverend," of course, was brevet-rank.)

"Not bad arrangements at all, you know," said Sir Rufus Tiburnus to Sir Zosimus Sulla. "Must go home and pack me bags; get an early start, what?"

"Yes, yes. Get a very early start. And let us both be sure to dress up very warm, remember poor old Ovid, chap absolutely perished with the cold. And . . . ah . . . and . . ."

"Yes? What else had you in mind?"

"Well, tell you the truth, not *sure*. What I had in mind. Hm. *Oh*. Trifling matter, to be sure. *Still*. In view of, ah, sundry possibilities? Religious unrest? Barbarian incursions?"

Sir Rufus was becoming just a bit restless. "What do you mean, 'religious unrest'? Decree has gone forth from Caesar Augustus, hasn't it? Chaps can follow any religion they want, can't they? As

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for 'Barbarian incursions,' stuff and nonsense; Barbarians were defeated at the last annual incursion and sent home with the usual rich gifts; won't be another incursion till . . . till . . . well, the actual date hasn't actually been decided on: very late next Spring, I should expect. *After* the freshets."

Sir Zosimus took a moment to digest this. Then he asked, "You mean . . . they've given us no cohorts? For our sacred journey?"

"Confound the man! *Exactly!* It is a *sac*red journey, isn't it? '*A sacred journey of Latin peace*,' forget who said that; poet chap. What? *No*, no cohorts. What d'you think we need cohorts for? We've got *me*." And he drew himself up a trifle. Sir Rufus Tiburnus may have been a bit long in the tooth, but he was still (so his friends took good care to tell him) a fine figure of a man.

Sir Zosimus Sulla (whose friends did not; in fact, they never mentioned the matter . . . to his face . . . aside, they referred to him as "Roly-poly little chap, nicest fella you'd want to meet."), Sir Zosimus Sulla did not seem to take utter content from this thought.

"*Me*," his companion and Brother-Superior repeated. "Who has, or need I remind you, been three times in command of Legions? Twice against the Borborygmians. And once against the Paphlagonians. So . . ."

"Yes, yes. Of course." His Junior Brother-Collegiate seemed a merest bit abstracted. "Still. Hm. Should we, ah, should we take along some *beads*, perhaps? In case we have to trade with the natives?"

Sir Rufus Tiburnus's reply to this suggestion, tentative though it was, was both familiar and brief. He said, "*Absit omen*."

Gaspar the Dreamer lay a-dreaming, behind his gates of horn and ivory. Then he said, without preamble, "The onyx egg." His servitors bowed silently. They brought him the onyx egg. Immense it was, and polished to a gloss, and they set it down with extreme care in its stand alongside Gaspar's bed. He gazed into it, long and long. He said, "Things do not go well."

"No, lord. Not *well*."

"Things do not go well at all."

"No, lord. No. Not at *all*."

"The Old Games are to be revived, I see."

"Yes, lord. *See*."

Curtains of dull crimson and bright black hung about the walls of the secret chamber of Gaspar the Dreamer. A whisper of incense burned.

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"I like that not."

"No, lord. *Not.*"

Gaspar looked once more into the onyx egg. It seemed that certain things were at move therein, but the moves, and, indeed, the forms and shapes of those which moved, were not clear.—Except, (perhaps) of course, to Gaspar the Dreamer. After some while he spoke again. "How can I be left full free to rule the realm of dreams of all this Isle (though, in truth, it is no Isle at all), if the Old Ones are given offering again? They like me not. They did never."

"No, lord, no. *Never.*"

Sometimes the secret chamber of Gaspar the Dreamer was round as a circle or a globe, sometimes it seemed to stand four-square, at other times it appeared triangular; and then it as it were was in a state of flux and nextly it had no shape for which the geometries of the Ægyptin had a name . . . and, certainly: no *Q.E.D.* Gaspar however did not care for *Q.E.D.* And neither did he care for *SPQR.* He was in no way fond of *CHI RHO.* And he shuddered at *YOD HAY VAV HAY.* All these might seem clean different things to some. To many. To most. But they had that in common in the dreams of Gaspar the Dreamer which beliked him not.

"Much of this is not strange," he said.

"No, lord. Not *strange.*"

His servitors seemed of few words.

But they were of many powers.

None benign.

So.

"Yet. Something is herein odd."

"Yes, lord. *Odd.*"

A silence fell. The silences of Gaspar were not like the silences of others. His silences were full of sounds. And his sounds, full of silences. He said: "Not some thing. Some one."

"Yes, lord. *One.*"

"He seemed new."

"Yes, lord. *New.*"

Again, the silence. Again, the sound. Gaspar gazed into the onyx egg. He said: "Bring me the sand."

"Yes, lord. *Sand.*"

The sand was brought to him in That Which We Name Not, and he blew upon it. It scattered, it darted hither and fro. It settled. A pattern lay upon the covering of the floor. "There and there. And there. Thence, those of sullen dreams, send."

"Yes, lord. *Send.*"

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"And give instructions: Such and such. And such."

The sand seemed to quiver, in the darkness visible.

"Yes, lord. *Such.*"

Once more there was a space which was a time. And a time which was a space. And then Gaspar said: "Bring me the boards of beechwood, with the baleful signs."

To this command it was not permitted to respond by one sound. In silence they were brought, and in silence laid before him. He for a while turned his face away from the onyx egg. He gazed for a while upon the beechen boards. And then he said, "Add thereunto one name."

Somewhere a man lay dozing in a corner, neath a filthy cloak. Of a sudden he rose. And set off away from where he had been. Somewhere else a man sat bolt upright and seized his whetstone and his sword. Somewhere three men slouching in a cave not even half-awake round about a dying fire got to their knees. Felt for their knives. Went on all fours to the hole of the cave and rose upon their feet. Their hands assured them of their short and ugly little spears. And *here* something happened, much the same. And *here*. And *there*. And *there* and *there*.

But as these men moved, *thence*, along all the paths along which they moved, and as they slouched or strode upon the roads they travelled, no one knew by looking at them what thoughts they had, if thoughts they had, indeed.

Only that they let their cloaks fall full around them.

As they journeyed; some, north. And some, south. And some, others, east and west. Under the ice-bright stars. Under the chill, thin moon. Slowly and from many places far from near, one could have gazed down and seen, calculated, drawn upon a map . . . even such a map as one draws upon the sand . . . that they all seemed heading for one sole spot the same.

The inhabitants of New Iguvium and, indeed, the rest of Nova Umbria—neither city nor state was very large—descended from a stock which had in its sole recorded migration exhausted all taste for innovation. There they were, there they stayed, there they intended to stay. To be sure, they no longer spoke their ancestral tongue; Latin and Greek had gradually replaced that, although they had replaced that slowly. For some years they had not worshipped their ancestral gods; that is, not openly: this had been for a while forbidden. The New Umbrians were of a rather placid nature: orders

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were orders. But when they considered either political or religious change, they were inclined, first, to be puzzled, and then to shrug their heavy shoulders. Amongst the things which caused them to puzzle and to shrug were the tidings (rather late in arriving, insofar as they might be said to have arrived at all) that there were now three Emperors in one Empire and three Persons in one God. Explanation failing these innovatory conceptions, the folk of New Umbria returned once again to the contemplation of the eternal verities, viz. that spelt was spelt, parsnips were parsnips, parsley was parsley, and that a nice lot of chines of roasted pork after a nice session of ceremony and sacrifice was something that they rather missed.

"Ye auncient goddes of Iguvium-in-Umbria be nocht butte dæmons," they were assured by the priests of the new religion, or religions—foreigners to a man, and speaking a very odd kind of Latin and of Greek indeed. "Ye sal in noe wissë be savèd, save ye receive Christen Baptism and commë of Lord's Day to hearë Divine Liturgie, eek y-clept ye Massë, at ye True Kirkë: *Maranatha*," concluded these missioners, ending with a word the Umbrians did not recognize at all as Latin *or* Greek and were all but certain sure was

"Ye auncient goddes of Iguvium-in-Umbria be nochte butte dæmons," they were assured by the priests of the new religion.

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not Umbrian, either. And, when asked which church *that* was, these funny foreigners proceeded to give funny answers; as it might be, "The Marcionite," or "The Orthodox," or "The Uniate Alexandrian Gnostic." And so on.

To which the Nova Umbrians gave, generally, some such answer as, "Oh," or, "Ahah," and, also, perhaps, "Um." They allowed these new priests to come and sprinkle water on themselves and their houses (which these new priests first inspected to be sure they contained no "idols," as they called the good old harmless little images) and on their fields: no harm in a little water-magic, was there? And, afterwards, they gave them money, which, often as not, they cast away and spat upon, saying, "This bore upon it the imprint of an Abomination!" when any fool could plainly see it bore upon it nothing but an Emperor arrayed as an official god, or something of the sort.

After this the Umbrians left the new priests alone, for they were clearly crazy and the crazy were, although of course sacred (having been touched by a god), best left alone; and the Umbrians went back to copulating in the furrows to insure good crops, as any sensible peasants would do. Except that nowadays they did it at night, in order to avoid fuss.

Pagan ceremony times went officially unobserved; the people of this largely-forgotten little land did on such seasons mutter to each other, "Us do miss they gurt chunks of good roast pork," and sigh and give a wistful glance at the formerly sacred precincts, wherein the Christians as a matter of principle tossed their rubbish; *naturally* the people of Nova Umbria and New Iguvium were delighted to hear that the latest new Emperor had not only said that the sacred ceremonies should be revived again but was sending them one of the good old colleges of priests to conduct them.

They turned to with right good will and cleared up the sacred precincts from the Obelisk to the Augurial Seats, although it was perhaps rather naughty of them to dump the rubbish in front of the churches, with guffaws of, "This do be thine and tha mayst ha' it back again!" And it was there in the sacred precincts, their camp-chairs set up close to the bronze tablets with the ancient rituals incised upon them in ancient Umbrian, that Sir Rufus Tiburnus and Sir Zosimus Sulla sat, crowned with garlands of flowers and plied with wine, after a triumphal welcome and following a fairly uneventful (after all) journey.

After the enthusiastic chief citizens had supplied them with liquor from the mossy amphorae of best local vintages, the Quæstor himself

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had come forward and presented the Falernian wine intended for the ceremony; the two Sacred Brothers felt obliged to ensure themselves that it had "not gone bad," as Sir Zosimus put it.

"Doesn't seem to have," said Sir Rufus, sipping. He gazed about the scene with seemly and dignified approval. "Hope the tablets are set up in the proper old order," he said. His garland had slipped a trifle, but no one had dared mention this . . . certainly not his "Younger Brother," who was, in fact, just as slightly tipsy as he himself was. "Hope so indeed; *awesome* inscriptions on them: . . . forget just what . . . " he added.

"Not forgetting," said Sir Zosimus, feeling rather reflective about old times, old tongues, old scenes; "not forgetting the awesome inscription in Old Latin, on the Lapis Niger in Old Rome, '*If two black oxen make poopy here: bad luck, SPQR*' . . . of course, I translate very freely."

Sir Rufus gazed at him. Sipped. Still gazed. Said: " '*Very freely*,' you call it?"

Sir Zosimus seemed to sense a touch of something in his compeer's voice. "Yes, '*very freely*,' I call it. . . . What should *you* call it?"

" '*Licentiously paraphrastic*,' is what *I* should call it."

"Oh, you should, should you?"

"Yes, I should. I *think*. Course, my Old Latin's a trifle rusty. May we have it again? What? Ur, *well*, I meant, have that translation again: but, no, of course not, don't mind if we have some of the Old Falernian again . . . Mmm. —*Well?*"

Sir Zosimus knit his brow; then said, " '*If two black oxen do doodoo here*—' "

Sir Rufus guffawed. " '*Doodoo*'? Moment ago it was '*poopoo*'?"

" '*Poopy*,' to be precise—"

"Fat lot you care about being precise. . . . I remember at *school*, what was that boy's name?—rustic boy—used to construe better than *you*—and as for your ha ha '*bad luck, SPQR*,' well, *I* would phrase it, ah, '*Woe upon ye, O Conscript Fathers and Assembled Plebs!*' "

Sir Zosimus made no attempt to dissemble. "Oh come. Oh come now. Oh that's rich. '*Woe upon ye*—' 'Licentiously paraphrastic,' ha!"

"*What?* — '*If two licentiously paraphrastic oxen eliminate here*—' ?"

"Ha ha, '*eliminate*,' that's a good one. That's rich. If '*poopoo*' and '*doodoo*' were good enough for Rumulus, Romus, and Mucus Scaevola—"

" 'Mucius,' if you don't mind."

"A detail. I *do* mind. —Pædant."

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"Pædant yourself. —'*Mucus*,' sounds as though he couldn't wipe his *nose*—"

"*Well*, matter of fact, as chap only *had* one hand and was holding a sword in it, probably *couldn't* wipe his nose: so there," said Sir Zosimus.

"I see no 'so there' to it: could've wiped his nose with the *back* of his one hand, sword or no s——"

"Well, if two oxen had just made ox-plop round about the Lapis Niger, probably poor old chap was more likely to want to *hold* his nose than to *wipe* it."

The two old men went into gales of laughter at this. The citizenry approved: this was more like it: laughing and winebibbing: *Old*-time religion. The citizenry (which, nowadays, here as elsewhere, included the peasantry) had reverently left their two new and *pro tem* priests alone, and busied themselves with such semi-sacred duties as assembling the sacrificial swine and getting ready a good bed of red-hot coals in the fire-pits; also drawing water from the old sacred well for scalding the bristles off the hogs whenever it should be time.

The Quæstor (whose office had at one time been largely fiscal) was standing by and listening, if only in a general sort of way (This was the way priests should talk!); he now took a step forward. "If it please Your Holinesses and if Your Holinesses are quite ready, we have here on the silvern tray the offerings of fat and grain and wine, with mead optional, for the sacred offerings. And the three pregnant sows—"

Sir Rufus fixed him with a certain Look which had once quelled mutinous legions. "Well, and suppose Our Holinesses are *not* ready, what would you propose to do about it?"

The Quæstor clearly not being prepared to propose doing anything about it, there was a very pointed silence, broken by Sir Rufus. " 'Mead optional,' eh? Let's have a—"

"Eh? 'Mead optional'? Let me see. Have a dekko at this bronze tablet with the rules incised on 'em in good old Umbrian. . . . Hm. Well, by the Nine Gods! '*Vinu heri puni*,' sure enough: '. . . *wine, with mead optional* . . . ,' well, what ought we do?"

"Have the mead brought out, is what we ought do, of course."

" '. . . *heri puni*,' 'mead optional,' bring out the mead then, you, Quæstor, and not so damned slow about it, either. Chap is damned slow, i'n't he?"

"Damned slow, with knobs on. Wouldn't be so slow if he had to trot across those pits of glowing coals to get the mead, *would* he?"

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"HA ha ha!"
"HO ho ho!"
"Quæ*stor!*"
But the Quæstor had already gone to get the mead. Rapidly.

SCENE: The manse of Father Fufluns, an heresiarch priest, in an hamlet. Enter *Basnobio*, assistant to same:
"You're wanted, Father Fufluns."
"Wanted for what?"
"To administer the Sacrament of Levitation, deemed illicit by the last Great Council for savoring of excessive sainthoods, as well of connection with the dead and reprobate laws of Levitical Purity, even if only homonymously. So get up."
Basnobio had a rather curt and cynical way about him, but, so learned and generally efficient was he that, really, his superior did not know how to get along without him; Basnobio had already followed him through several sundry heresies and schisms with a loyalty which must be deemed admirable; only maybe not. *Basnobio took tips!*
Father Fufluns wanted his lunch, as well as other things not wanted, probably, by whomever waited now without; and was inclined to grumble. And grumble he now did. "Oh for the sake of sweet Heaven and Saint Ephraim the Deacon of Edessa (as correctly interpreted)! Never a moment's peace in this parish; how am I supposed to have time to unclothe the naked and visit the sick and cast out dæmons if people keep coming and wanting to be levitated?" He nevertheless arose and reached for the robes his assistant was holding out.
Basnobio was not having any of these complaints just then. "Your Reverence should have thought of that before joining the Neognostic Heterodox Heretical Church. Your Reverence had a very promising career ahead of him in the Mixolydian Musicological Church."
"Yes, but the Mixolydian hierarchy were so toffy-nosed, called me a whoremonger and pæderast and a simonizer and I can't remember what else they didn't call me . . . *and they said I sang off-key!* A *lie!* I merely did not invariably sing in the Mixolydian Mode, is all. Matter of *con*science; and if a man cannot sing as the Spirit moves him, well—" His voice was by now slightly muffled by reason of having to penetrate several layers of robes, including the so-called Mantle of Elijah. This was an exceptionally thick sheepskin, very utile in the wintery regions of, say, Upper Sarmatia, but merely picturesque and damnably itchy in the more summery climates to

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the south: *still*: Levi*ta*tion. . . . Elijah had gone *up* . . . hadn't he?

"Ready now," said Father Fufluns.

Peregrine had followed as the branches of the trees had indicated he should, and the following had at first been slightly difficult, for there lay at this first point between the trees an abrupt shelving of sheer rock. It was, fortunately, not particularly high and not particularly rough, and, fortunately, the hooves of his horse marked it but little: perhaps, save to some eye as keen as that of the legendary Athenian, not at all: and the legendary Athenian, were he still around at all, was certainly not around here, was probably far away in deep discussion with the Talmudic Sages of Sura and Pumbaditha, discussing the recondities of the egg laid on the Sabbath, and the malignant habit of certain sectaries of lighting false beacon fires in pretension of having seen the New Moon. This outcropping of the barebones of the earth gave way after a while to the forest true, and, obedient always to the waving branches, Peregrine followed through the forest.

The forests . . .

Forests of oak, forests of pine; oak for goodly furnitures and the keels and timbers and the great ribs of ships, oak for wine barrels. Pine for tar and planks for said ships and pitch to caulk them with. Pine for resin to pour into the oak barrels to keep the air from the wine and so to keep the wine from souring. Pine for kindling for a quick flame; oak for the great glowing beds of coals like lumps of amber, beds of glowing coals to last the night and roast the ox. A many generations of pine planks would come and go in any one boat and ship, but the oak timbers were forever. —Well, almost forever: when the oak went, the vessels went, too. For quickness and haste and rapid service: pine. For endurance: oak.

Presently Peregrine saw, for one, that the branches were wavering rather than waving. And, for another, that he was on some slight semblance of a road: high and heavy grew the grass thereon: but, clear: a road.

Where the road might lead, and he hoped it might lead him to his friends the folk of Alfland, for, though he had not known them for long, they were all the folk he did in this distant land know; whither the road might take him was of importance: but of more importance was: which way was he to take the road?

There was no wind he felt, but, as though there were a wind the smaller trees inclined their trunks, and the larger trees moved their branches no thicker than the slender trees. Moved them, slowly,

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and he supposed, for one last time. Moved them towards the right. Peregrine gave them all one last and loving salute, heard one loving and last rustle, hum and thrum. He turned his horse's head to the right.

He had scarce gone a league, or maybe not even half a league, when he heard a voice call, "*Halt.* Pass on at your *per*il," said the voice. It was a reedy, wavery voice, and, if it did not indeed lack all conviction, well, certainly it lacked much. Peregrine looked ahead, he looked right, he looked left; realizing that he had been looking at his own eye-level, he next looked *up*: nothing.

So he looked *down*.

And there, reclining more than somewhat rather wearily under a bush of sweet lavender, he observed the oldest, be-draggeldest, most woe-begone–looking sphynx that he had ever encountered; smeared with cheap eye-paint which had more than just begun to run, and smelling of very stale patchouli.

"*Well!*" said Peregrine. Ought his flesh to have crawled? There was after all no visible cliff over which the sphynx might have thrown him, as was (supposedly) the very bad habit of sphynxes (Appledore had once insisted that the proper plural was *sphynges*, but Appledore was not here—of a sudden Peregrine missed the learned and utterly idiosyncratic old man very much: in vain). "Well, well, *well*. —Aren't you supposed to ask me a question?" he asked.

"Well, *hon*estly," said the sphynx. "I mean, *ac*tually. Of *course* I'm supposed to ask you a question!" Its manner was very slightly petulant, but something else overlay the petulance. "The truth is, if you *really* want to know," the sphynx said, moodily, "is that I've run out of questions to *ask*." And its lower lip quivered, and a tear ran out of each eye, further smearing its eye-paint, which really was in no state to stand much more smearing. And it sniffled. And then it said, "You don't happen to know any good *rid*dles, I suppose?" This was, after all, it really *was* a question. But it was asked without much hope.

"I used to have a very *good* question, I mean, riddle, and it used to fool oh just *oodles* of people. And then that *Greek*—"

"Theseus?"

"Was that his name? Oh, I don't care what his name was, really, but he went on and just told, well, simply, *ev*erybody, what the answer *was*. And things have never been the same since. People used to *laugh* when they'd see me, after that. Even before I'd had a *chance* to ask." And it put its head under its wing and blew its nose. Then the head emerged again, and regarded Peregrine with

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brighter eyes. "*Hmmm?*" it asked.

"Well, I don't know if I ought to," Peregrine said, thoughtfully, fingering his fairly new-grown moustache (it really was a moustache by now, and not a mere line of dark down). "Besides, I'd thought he'd killed you—"

The sphynx clicked its tongue. "Oh, I was just *sham*ming. I *play*ed dead. Imagine! He actually *tried* to kill me! The *rat!*"

"Well? Hadn't you tried to kill him? And other people? If they couldn't answer your silly old riddle?"

It was with something like astonishment that the sphynx now looked up. " '*Kill* people?' Oh for pity's sake: *no!* Of course they'd had to pay a *pen*alty: but *that* wasn't the penalty! And I don't know what *made* that Greek so hoity-toity . . . I *mean*, AFTER ALL!"

"Oh, well," said Peregrine. He thought a moment. "A riddle, hey?" The sphynx regarded him with bird-bright eyes. "Hey!" exclaimed Peregrine. "How about this one? 'What is it that has four legs and flies?' "

The sphynx huddled itself together, frowned fiercely, concentrated. A while passed. Then the sphynx said, " '*What is it that has four legs and flies*?' You can't, I suppose, mean another sphynx? No, that would be too easy. —A, a griffin? *No*? Oh. Oh *my!* A pegasus?"

Peregrine said that that was closer, but it wasn't quite right.

"Well," the sphynx said, more briskly than usual; "I give *up*. I surrender. (Besides, none of those answers seemed very good at *all*.) Very well. What *does* have four legs and flies?"

"A dead horse."

The sphynx blinked. Then it moistened one toe in its mouth and with it moistened one eyebrow. Then it placed one wing-feather alongside its nose. Then it winked. Then it suddenly began running around in circles, flapping its wings and cackling with delighted glee. Then it flew up into the air and circled round and round and round about; then, and in a most abrupt manner, flew down again. "Something the matter?" asked Peregrine, concerned for the creature.

But he need not have been. For the creature.

"*Pssst*," the sphynx said. "Are you by any chance being followed by a band of armèd men, bearing a banner with the blazon of a clenchèd fist."

"*Zeus*-piter," said Peregrine. "Well, I don't know for sure. I mean, I might *be*. I hadn't planned to be. I wonder if that was what the dryads had been warning me about? Uh . . . are they *close*?"

"*Wellll*. . . ." The sphynx looked at him a moment with a look in

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its eye. Then the sphynx sighed. "Oh, not really. I *was* going to tell you a big fib, and then I was— But I won't. So there. No. Not what you'd call *close*. But. I am afraid. Enjoy your company though I do, and I *do*. The longer we spend in these moments of delightful conversation, well, the closer they may *get*. And, whilst this may mean *one* thing for *me*, it may, I am afraid, mean quite another thing for *you*. So," and here another tear trickled down the sphynx's cheek, "*off* you *go*. —You'll never *know* what you've done for me!" And, as Peregrine, with a wave of his hand, started to move along, the sphynx, with a flap of its wings, came flying up and gave him a quick, a very quick embrace, and a quick, a very quick, kiss. And then flew not merely down, but away; and out of sight.

Peregrine raised his hand to touch the place. It was, alas, both wet and smeary. But he was grateful enough, and man enough, not to wipe at it till he was well out of sight.

The dragon Smaragderos was leisurely gliding along through the azure realms of air at a very high, and consequently, very safe altitude, when he became somewhat suddenly aware of something which much misliked him; that is, not to be needlessly archaic or obscure, he became aware of something which the dragon Smaragderos much misliked: to say (as, indeed, we *have* said) that it "much misliked him" is to be indeed guilty of what some have called, and indeed still call *the pathetic fallacy*: *id est*, to personify Nature and to attribute thereunto qualities purely human: oh, well. And this something he described to himself, in a ritually incantatory mutter, as "Strong head winds from north northwest, expected soon to reach gale force . . ." —"Soon," at any rate, at that particular altitude.

Now, it is not that the dragon Smaragderos absolutely could not fly into the headwinds, but, after all, the *effort* . . . the *energy* . . . He had already hidden the Treasure of Alfland, *where*, it was for him to know and humans to find out, and now he had other things on his mind. He thought of these things, even as he thought of these new other things; and the thoughts of a long and scaly dragon are long and scaly thoughts; and he felt immediately obliged to consider his present situation.

Should he go, the while these high winds lasted, for rest and shelter to and in a craggy cave he knew of?—*no*: "Filthy stinking hole, some dragons have no sense of the elements of sanitation, and it's a dirty dragon which fouls its own lair . . . or even a lair which, belonging to no one in particular, is after all *ev*eryone's lair . . ."

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The sphynx, with a flap of its wings, came flying up and gave him a quick, a very quick kiss.

Something now seemed nibbling at the edges of the dragonic mind, and he considered upon the thought as he essayed trial flights at different levels in order to see if avoiding the headwinds (let alone the gales) were possible . . . and then the thought came into full center: somewhere on or close abaft the pineal eye: "*Ballast!*" he cried. "I must take on ballast!" —chuckling and shaking his scaly ("squamous," if you prefer; *we* do *not*) head in self-reproach at having for so long overlooked the obvious.

Ballast. A large rock might just do. One large enough, but not, of course, *too* large. A log. Or, as it may be, a sheep. Or an ox. He might carry any of these in his claws. It would all depend.

And he began to look down and round and all about very, very keenly.

"*Mead.* Took your own bloody time about it, I must say. *Hmmm* . . . Not bad mead. Eh?" said the Rev. Sir Zosimus Sulla.

"Not bad mead at all," the Rev. Sir Rufus Tiburnus concurred. "*Well.* Suppose we must get on with it; be here all day and all night,

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else. Let me see, now." He squinted at the bronze tablets containing the directions for the sacred rituals, quoted, " 'Sacrifice to Jupiter Grabovius . . .' "

" 'Jupiter *Grabovius?*' "

"Says *here*; have a dekko yourself, if you don't believe me: 'Sacrifice to Jupiter Grabovius . . . Sacrifice to Trebus Jovius, and,' ah, ah, what's all this? *Ah!* 'Sacrifice to *Mars* Grabovius' (local deities assimilated to the State Cultus, must be respectful no matter how odd they sound, else the native might get restless and we shan't be able to stay the night; can't have the natives getting restless) . . . And . . . and . . . I say, what's it say down here, no, confound it, *here*: all these squiggly little letters . . . ?"

Sir Zosimus peered closely. "Says, '*Pray in a murmur, sacrifice with mead.*' "

"No more mead. '*Three pregnant sows*,' yes; hear them squealing? But—mead? No more mead. See for yourself. No more mead."

"Well, *get* some more mead, then, I say! Quæstor!"

The Quæstor approached but a bit more closely. "Pray pardon, Your Holinesses," he said, very diffidently, "but the correct reading of that last line is '*meal*.' Not '*mead*'. . . ."

"Precious lot *you* know about a correct reading," said Sir Rufus, with warmth. "—Shifty looking fellow, i'n't he?"

"Shifty looking fellow with knobs on. —Who *got* those sows pregnant, I should like to know?—Bring out the mead, I say!"

"I say so, too—"

The Quæstor scurried off; Sir Rufus calling after him, "And give some to the local Conscript Fathers, silly old dotards if ever I saw some, it will help wash the mustard out of their moustaches—"

"Yes, quite: I say, you Quæstor: fetch out all the mead there is—and give some to the local Plebs, too. —Eh?" he turned and faced his Sacred Brother.

Who at once said, "By all means give some to the Plebs, too. Give lots of some to the Plebs. Backbone of the State, the Plebs, what?"

Sir Zosimus nodded so vigorously that his garland slipped e'en more askew. "Backbone of the State, with knobs on. . . . What's it say next?"

The Very Reverend Sir Rufus Tiburnus concentrated on the exceedingly awesome syllables of the exceedingly obsolete Umbrian language. "Says, '*Sevaknis persnihmu pert spinia isunt klaves persnihmu*,' well, that seems simple enough: '*Spit ceremonially, pray on the other side of the Obelisk (or Simulacrum) on the spinial, and*,' hmm, hmm . . . *What*? '*At the same spot he shall pray with*

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the smearing-sticks . . . ?' "

"I fail to share your simplistic view. *I* read it—*obviously*—'*With the ceremonial spits he shall pray on the other side of the Obelisk*, etc.' "

His sacred and reverend colleague peered again. "Eh? Oh. Hm. Well. P'r'aps you're right. . . . Well, and now do you construe, *isunt klaves persnihmu*, haw haw, 'At the same spot he shall pray with the smearing-sticks,' silly of me, what? How do you construe?"

"I construe, '*At the same spot he shall pray with the smearing sticks.*' "

Sir R. Tiburnus stared at him, aghast. " '—*with* the *smear*ing sticks?' "

"Or in other words, '*Anoint the Obelisk*' (or, if you prefer, 'the Simulacrum') . . ."

"If I were to tell you what I should *real*ly prefer, th' immortal gods might strike me dead."

"Serve you jolly well right, too, probably. . . . Well, well, let us see what's the rest of this part. *Veskles snate asnates*, oh dear *me!* '*Vessels snotty and unsnotty*,' well, speak about 'rude forefathers,' this beats anything!"

Sir the Very Reverend Rufus Tiburnus said, more than a trifle smugly, " '*Vessels wet and un-wet*,' mean to say, '—*and dry*,' is surely the correct reading here in any but a slavishly literal sense—"

"Oh get *on* with it, for pity's sake, there are no wreaths for rhetoric being handed out here."

His colleague shrugged, continued his readings from the bronze tablets. " '*With the ceremonial vessels wet and dry he shall pray at the Obelisk*' (or Simulacrum, if you prefer, or even if you don't). '*He shall pour a libation and dance the tripudium. He shall anoint the Simulacrum* (or *Obelisk*), *and*—' Where are those confounded wooden *spoons?*—'*smearing-sticks*' indeed!—'*and pray with the ceremonial unguent, and wash his hands away from the altar. He shall return to the altar, at the altar he shall pray silently with ceremonial wine*,' there is no ceremonial wine left—"

"*Pray* for some, then."

"I fail to share your exceedingly questionable piety. . . . '*Struclas fiklas sufafias kumaltu kapire punes vepuratu*,' oh *gods!* Is there no *end* to this? Ah well: *Um*brian: one has one's duty, one *does* it: Blibble blibble blabble blabble, tum-te-tum, fiddle-de-*de*, '*And the dog*,' *dread*ful thing, sacrificing a *dog*; fortunately commuted ages ago, so . . . which is to say—'*the hog*,' which is to *say*, one trotter of *one* hog, '*shall be buried at the altar. Lucius Teteius, son of Titus,*

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approved the foregoing in his Quæstorship.' "

"Wretched fellow. . . . Still . . . changed *dog* to *hog*, chap can't be *all* bad."

"Backbone of the State, these native Quæstors. What's the next bit there?"

" 'And *the Sacred Brothers*,' that's you and me, you know, '*are required to give to the Clavernii at the Festival ten portions of pickled pork and five portions of roasted goat-meat, and the Clavernii*,' whoever *they* are—"

"Backbone of the State."

" '—*are required to give to the Sacred Brothers six pounds of choice spelt, "cumquat taxea lardum,"* ' or some such piffle . . . *Well.* They'll take *roasted* pork, like it, lard it, or lump it; if they want *goat*, let them go chase one; and they can bloody well keep their choice spelt to make up the difference. —'*Choice spelt*,' what should we do with spelt nowadays, might I ask?"

"I feed it to me peacocks, back home, what *I* do with it."

"Oh I say, do you have peacocks back home?"

"Yes I do. Dreadful noisy birds they are, and I'd poison them all, 'cept that they annoy me wife, only reason I've *got* 'em."

"Well, well: and, fancy, I never knew. Well, would *you* like the spelt?"

"No no no. Thousand thanks. Very kind of you. Can buy it cheaper in the market, back home."

". . . well, that's settled, then. . . . *Or*, hmm, suppose we *could* translate this bit as '*beech-cured ham*' or '*fat bacon*,' although, must admit, the Umbrian *h* is a difficulty—"

"The Umbrian *h* is a *damned* difficulty, trouble with the Umbrian *h*, you want to know. —*Out of the question!* Roast pork, good enough for anyone; good enough for Homer: good enough for *me, you*, and certainly for these chaps. '*Pickled pork*,' indeed, la-de-da: just watch 'em gobble up the good old roasted when the time comes!"

From place to place behind the semi-ruinous spinial-wall a number of small boys had all this while been running message relays; one of them now came sloping up to where the Conscript Fathers were sitting in front of the Plebs, who had never before had all the mead they could drink; one of the former addressed the small boy.

"Ah, my little man, and what are the august and distinguished visiting clergy declaiming at this point of the sacred ritual?"

The little man could hardly have cared less about the finer points of the declamation; his answer was succinct. "Roast pork, Gaffer."

This message spread like lightning amongst all the assembled;

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there followed instant declarations of, "Ah, roast pork! Roast pork! *That's* the old time religion, and it's good enough for me!" And the few of the few local Christians who had dared the ecclesiastical anathema to come close enough to listen and, now and then, peek (and to observe, with great disappointment, the total absence of lions and therefore their chances of martyrdom), scowled and sneered behind their hands, and bit their beards with bitterness.

The particular path on which Peregrine now found himself was so overgrown that the tired horse needed scarcely stop to graze; it sufficed the beast merely to slow down a trifle and snaffle up the grass as it poked along. Indeed the thought had come into Perry's mind that he might well go faster were he to leave his horse behind: but two things dissuaded him: for one, it would have been better to have done so sooner, where the animal might merely have wandered off into plowland and thus offer no clue: *now*, if found, it would stand out like an elephant—and, for another, it was after all not *his*, Perry's horse, and ill could King Alf spare it. And so, with a sigh—

—his sigh, however, was interrupted by two actions, both emanating from the horse (Perry had never learned its name; from time to time and general principles he had addressed it as Dobbin, but, for all the good this did he might as well have called it Crumback, Sookey, or Fido): first the horse paused and raised its tail, and for no such purpose as keeping the sun out of its rider's eye; then the horse proceeded to pour an immense libation; then the horse broke wind with a sound like . . . well, if not precisely like thunder, at least like the sound of the thunder-machine in one of your better equipped amphitheaters, does the script call for it . . . the horse raised its ponderous head, and first it cried Ha Ha; then it neighed; then it made a few sounds as if to say, For this relief, much thanks. And *then*, and to Perry's absolute astonishment (still, he kept hold of such items of harness and horse-gear as he might), the horse broke into something much like a ponderous trot; a gallop, no, one could not call it a gallop . . . not really. . . .

It seemed to Peregrine that he had been taking one side road and by-road after another, and for quite some time, now; he had no real idea at all where he was, but he was well off the main-travelled roads, and well he knew it.

Perhaps the unaccustomed hard-riding had shaken Perry's brain, but for whatever reason, shaken-up he did feel, and in a rather odd way to which he could put no name. How long had he *been* on this

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horse, anyway?—he had no idea. He did, however, have the idea that, pursuit or not, it would be far from amiss were he to dismount; and this he did, stretched his cramped legs and swung his arms (one by one, for he switched the bridle from hand to hand), and he yawned and blinked and kicked the cramp from either leg. . . .

He became aware that he had been feeling thirsty, and he knew that his leather bottle had been a long while empty, although he shook it next his ear to make sure: it had been a long while empty. Well; and if he were thirsty, so must be the horse . . . an inference from minor to major, or was it from major to minor.

Ah well.

So he looked for water. This back-road had certainly borne no imperial posting-party for long and long and long; no carts of merchandise had worn the weeds out of its overgrown ruts in many and well a day. There were no more huge and vasty trees, second-growth at best the timber was, and beneath and behind the shrubble and the stubble and the thistle in the overgrown fields he could see more than one evidence of fallen-down (when not indeed burnt-down) latifundial villas. Horse ambling on ponderously behind him, Perry picked his way along broken bricks and grass-grown gravel and even pavings of stone. He found here a well: the well was stopped up with stones, one passing swarm of looters and wreckers had seen well that the nexting swarm would slake no thirst *there*. He sought for conduits; the conduits had fallen in, were still moist and green; but no shovel was there to delve and make depth of water with. There were certainly enough sunken cellars with and without crumbled walls to have filled with water in the wet season: but now was the wet season not. Peregrine sighed again; then a thought came to him: could he find a willow twig—but no: dowsing-rod or not, still he would needs dig and delve . . . well . . . if the water were perhaps very near the surface, perhaps a sharpened stick . . .

A wall by no means fallen was straight in front of him, and, as he could not go through it, he would needs go around it; he turned right and . . . stopped.

For a moment he could not even fathom *why* he had stopped; nor, as he felt himself swinging left, could he imagine *why* he was swinging left. Surely he was more tired by far than he had thought . . . *Ah!*

He was swinging left because the horse was swinging left: Therefore . . . therefore *what?* Best follow the horse, for at any rate one of them knew where he was going, and where he wanted to go: and that one was the horse. And the horse neighed again and the horse whinnied and the horse quickened his pace.

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Ahead lay a pond. Perry thought, first of all, that he would now be able to drink. And (he thought), after that, he might even be able to have a swim: if the pond were not deep enough, well, he might at any rate kneel in it and splash. Off not too far in the distance he saw some large outcroppings of rocks, porous, perhaps; certainly with holes in them visible even from here. At once he forgot them: he and horse were at the water. The horse waded in, snorting, and dipped his muzzle. Peregrine knelt at the berm and cupped his hands and drank. And drank. And—

He was still drinking even as he began to wriggle out of his clothes; then he gave over drinking, his first thirst slaked, and got well and altogether out of the green tunicle and the trews with the large brown check; then he got well into the water, although he shivered with pleasure as the cool and cold and wet of it began to tickle his tiny hairs, before he could stoop even to cover his hams and splash his breast and shoulders. He intended to go further in, but simple fatigue got the better of him, he simply sat down and sat back, and once again he sighed. But it was a simple sigh.

And so, sitting, he looked around him. People were after all still living hereabouts, he had seen them not and heard them not, he saw no signs of whatever men and women they might be: but there: and there: and *there*: on the muddy parts of the banks of the pond, he saw their children's footprints.

And then he saw the children, and he began a smile and a gesture of friendship—

—and finished neither—

Child-size they were. But they were not children.

Children at two feet high, or even perhaps at most three, children have neither breasts a-pout nor a-dangle, nor have children beards and body-hair.

His blood chilled, his heart swelled, the flesh prickled and his tiny hairs stood out; his every muscle tensed: could he at one dash make for his horse (he never gave a *thought* to his clothes) and mount—

Would the horse have taken flight along with him? Would he even have reached the horse? These Weefolk had arrows and had bows: they did not even nock one in the other. They had spears, of a sort, the small, small, small, very small folk: they did not throw them. For one long moment all stood still. The water did not even ripple. Then he saw them pointing at him, then he saw them lay their weapons down, then he heard them make the oddest sound that ever he had heard—and saw how they made it—by cupping their hands to their armpits and pumping their arms. It was, in a way, a wel-

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come. In a way, it was, an applause. And then they spoke.

Why, we saw upon thee the mark of safe-passage made by our sister-brother the Smynx, said one, said more than one, when Peregrine came at last to ask. (By and by he realized the Weefolk could never pronounce a *p* or *ph* when it followed an *s*: And would (thought he) they had no greater problem.) Perry could no more than blink at this; they smiled a bit—they almost never laughed, nor made other loudly sounds—and touched him . . . several, after the first bold touch, made bold enough to touch him, too: others did not . . . not then, not ever. . . . He felt where their tiny fingers felt: enough trace of the Sphynx's eye-paint and scented facial unguents and ointments remained upon a cheek. *But canna thu no' guess we smellet thee first?*

"I daresay," said Perry, wryly. But the wryness was wasted. As for any sneer or jeer, or even tolerant chuckle or embarrassed explanation of what had been . . . or had not been . . . between him and the Sphynx: there was no such need, no need for such; no—in fact—even thought of such. Sphynx was Sphynx. Weefolk were Weefolk. The small smile was merely at his, Perry's, forgetfulness that the sign (or smear) was still, in remnants, on his cheek at all.

It was warm enough in the pelts they'd given him, given him for warmth, for they themselves were naked and they knew it not . . . or, at any rate, cared for it not, whilst his clothes lay a-soak in some crudely-dammed pool in a creek, along with some saponiferous herb. He didn't even know what pelts they were, save that, hair-side inside, it was warm enough in them. Some pan of bark sat alongside him with something in it, he knew not what, it was food; from time to time he dipped and ate. Talk was not incessant; silence was not interminable; he knew that the horse was penned safe within some rocky cleft, knew that none of his Alvish friends had come this way . . . he had not really thought they had, unless they'd circled: still . . . they *might* have circled . . . and so for the moment he felt safe and warm. And, slightly, drowsy.

A Weewoman was speaking now, speaking soft and low: he listened. *Och, the Gotha push down the Roma ond the Roma push down the Kelta ond the Kelta push down the Weefolk; thu knowedd this; thu knowedd the Weefolk be we . . .* Indeed they *were* wee, though scarcely hop-o'-my-thumb wee; Perry realized that if one had to live in holes in the rock, it was a great help to *be* wee. *We study, och, what arts we may, here in the greeny wood . . . we ferm not, for why 'ould we ferm? So they 'ould take our crops, och, ond ot*

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lahst, our lahnd? If we did ought in metal 'ork, 'ould they not see ond smell the forge-smoke ond hear the clong of metal, metal-on? We gother the small fruits o' the soil, the thucket, the forest and the fens . . . the scrannel herbs ond the rune-thorns, the rune-roots ond the magic mosses . . . ond we 'ork in thot sort wise . . . we spin spells, we weave webs, we moil in magic, these be our arts, such are our crops, in this wise 'lone do we ferm and delve and forge. . . .

There was a question, at least one question, no: at least two: by logical extension: three . . . in his mind. But a great drowse was upon him, and . . . and . . .

Ahsk it, gigont, said a Weeman.

In the dimlight, Perry strove to form some several thoughts. A few were simple. "Does bale or bane lie yet behind me? Does bane or bale lie yet before me? And can I even somewhat avoid the same?"

Yes. Ond—

Yes. Ond—

Somewhat.

He slept.

It was day, and sans the bonecold of dawn, but, it being somewhat

Child-size they were. But they were not children.

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overcast, more than this, in wise of time, he could not say. They had rigged him a boothie or a bower of branches, roofed with rough-thatch bound in bundles; now, he being seen or heard to move, once again the tiny figures came out of the mists: fewer than before; he was by now less of a curiosity and wonder. And they brought him chestnut ground in a quern and mixed with honey-and-water. And he ate.

And then he talked. He had been so silent before on all his long way, with none to hearken, save himself, the Trees, the Sphynx, and the horse; so now perhaps he babbled more than—

But they listened.

"I suppose, I am sure, there is no clepsydra among you, nor am I myself accustomed to marking much the hours; generally I let the cock and the ass do that, the one by his crowing and other by his braying . . . and such a thing as a calendar, why it's so long since I've seen one I can tell neither calends from ides nor ides from gules . . . and yet, I confess, there is somewhat and something which confuses me about the matter of time . . . of latterly . . . of now. . . ." And he stroked his beard; perhaps it really was thicker than before, he was after all of an age when the beard after long quiescence does grow swift and thick in no great time. . . .

Och, gigont . . . Gigont, och. . . .

They seemed to speak to him in turns . . . and even so, with some almost-difficulty . . . clearly, from the hesitations, the pauses, the matter was not one of customary and frequent talk . . . and yet there was no confusion amongst them . . . in the matter . . . thus:

Hast thu not heard, gigont, thy philosophers tell thot there be seven, or be they eight, and what motter and who care . . . not we . . . some certain number of zones which engirdle the yarth . . . that these be girds or belts of clime . . . but it seem that they have no' taught, ond so we must suppose a-neither have they larned, of one other zone . . . of one, at least, other . . . these girds, or belts, or zones, ha' it so: these eight or seven pass round about this ball of dung on which we live, they pass from left to right, from right to left. . . .

But tother belt: no. *For tis the belt, no' of* clime, *but of* time: *ond it posseth round about ye tother way, from pole to pole and no' from sunbright to sundim . . . it toucheth but here and there, but lightly . . . for 'tis in some measure moved by the moon, and the moon is but lightly moving, for the moon is but planet of way . . . but it toucheth ever in yonder countryside . . . and whosoever ond whensoever posseth by ond through, why he ond she cometh as*

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'twere from oneday to notherday . . . mayhop from onemoon to nothermoon. . . .

. . . we should not, och, gigont, were we thee, move the heart much about it . . . is there ought thu const do to change it? A-nay. None. Argo, forbear to fret. What con be done, ond we shall do it: it be thus:

And whilst the *thus* was still in preparation, down the narrow path between one cleft in the rocks and another (the latter serving as way to the world at large) came the horse: and he looked not only fresher for his night's rest but fresher than he had ever looked: coat glossy, hooves cleaned, even the feather-hair-clumps above his hooves all smooth and free of clots of mud. The beast was not sore-backed nor saddle-galled, and his mane was well-combed, with flowers braided into it. And, inasmuch as there were not other horses round about, and no reason to think that the Weefolk served regular stints in someone's stable, Peregrine bethought him thoughtfully that an art more than mere grooming may well have been well at work. . . .

He thanked them on behalf of the horse; whilst yet he was so doing, out came water-bottles of good size and well-carved of wood with wooden stopples; came out basket of berries fresh and berries dried; parched grain and dried mushrooms and dried wild-apples, these last so fragrant that Perry felt, almost, he could live upon the smell of them alone.

He was extending his thanks when he observed some other tasks going on, and, so soon as he had finished his courtesies, he turned to observe what these might be: great hampers woven of withy-withes were being fetched along, and, amidst much mutterings, being emptied on the road in the direction whence he had come; when he made but an half-step to go look closelier, he was stopped. Stopped politely, but: stopped. The Weefolk were, indeed, wee.

They were, also, strong.

"Oh, I'm sorry if I—" Peregrine began. But apologies were not expected; what were expected were explanations, and these his hosts at once gave him.

The bane and bale which pursueth thee consist in men upon harses ond in men upon foot; they be not many, only one hond ond one finger: but they be armed.

It took him but a moment to realize that *six* was the number of his pursuers; as to how this or any of this was known, he asked not. He felt he ought not ask anything at all; and, indeed, the explanations continued without his questioning.

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Thu seest yander thorns. Indeed he did, saw them full well even from where he stood, no more prickles of the berry-bush or the rose, but great thick spurs like those on wild cockerels. *These be thucket-thorns of certain kind. These be rune-thorns we be scottering on the road behind thee. They will be, och, costing spells upon the horses of the men of bale and bane, and will make them walk in circles; when the men of bale and bane dismount to see what reason, they . . . ond those already afoot . . . they shall walk in circles, too—och! they shall walk widdershins till they drop, till they die . . . or till the spell be braken: which be the same thing. . . .*

So it was that Peregrine left the wee-people-who-live-in-the-hills, who, owing him nought, had given him much. For long and for long had they been driven further and further and deeper and deeper; for how long this their present respite might last, he could not know. The great conquests of the world occur like claps of thunder: and in this latest silence, as Empire crumbled, for a while at least they would have peace.

Presently he left both woods and hills behind him, and, descending, found the road (which showed signs of being more travelled than before) began to lead him through a land as flat, almost, as an offering of unleavened bread.

But before he had quite reached the level plain he had seen lying at no very great distance away, if not a city, at least a town, or—if not quite a town, or even a village, at least a hamlet.

He took a deep breath. And he rode on.

As anyone who was really anyone was watching the Sacred Ceremony (saving of course the few local Christians, who were under an episcopal anathema not to attend) (and the even fewer local Jews, who would not have attended anyway: one of these, named Reuben, was at this very moment asking another one, named Simeon, if there was or was not basically a difference between Christianism and Paganism; Simeon answered that there certainly was, to wit, the same difference that there was if the rock fell on the pitcher or the pitcher fell on the rock)—since almost everyone was in the center of New Iguvium, the capital—such as it was—of Nova Umbria, scarcely anyone was around to observe the gradual gathering of a certain number of men under the arches of what had once been the Stoa; there was a certain furtiveness in their gathering, there, a certain . . . one might say . . . secretiveness . . . which, since they were quite alone, seemed rather superfluous. Had anyone been pres-

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ent to see them, anyone would have observed that, somewhat oddly, they were all cloaked. And someone might have observed that as, from time to time, as one of them moved, which was not often, here and there was disclosed a bulge . . . which might have been a sword . . . or a javelin . . . or, even, at least, a knife. . . .

As it happened, and to be quite precise, they were *not* quite alone; "anyone who was really anyone" and "scarcely anyone" does not exclude absolutely everyone: *some*one else *was* there, and that was the local blind man. This one, whose name, which he had himself almost forgotten, was Pappus, had usually a small boy to guide him round the town: but today the small boy, curse him!, had forsaken his duty in order to be one of the relay-messengers: and so Pappus, finding himself forgotten, had gotten so far as at least one familiar spot, a sheltered niche lying opposite the Stoa, and here he had sat him down to wait. He had not much but of patience; and of this he had plenty.

The arrival of these newcomers, quietly though they arrived, had not by him passed unnoticed; from time to time Pappus had lifted up his cracked old voice and uttered his familiar plea and plaint of "Give some'at to a pore h'old blind man, citizens—a chunk of bread, a bit o' meat, a sop o' wine. . . ." But no one had given him any of these. "Give arf-an-obol to a weary h'old blind man, chaps . . . arf a happle, a b'iled hegg, a few nuts. . . ." But no one had given him any of these things, either. Pappus did not bother even sighing. At least for the moment no one was pushing him aside, no one was tripping him up; it was not raining, and he was, in his niche, out of the wind. By and by he began to think such a gathering as he was aware was going on, so far from the Sacred Precincts, must be rather odd. But he neither said nor did anything. Only, he listened. Always, in fact, he listened. It was surprising . . . or, it might have been surprising to others, if they had thought about it; it was not surprising to Pappus . . . how many, many people assumed, sans thought, that because the old man was blind he must be deaf as well. And he was not deaf. At all. Now and then something was said in his near-presence which might not have been said in the near-presence of another. Often, of course, what this was, which was so said, was either of no consequence or (to Pappus) of no comprehension. Often. But not always. And sometimes he was able to repeat, and to pass on what was said, to someone else. To whom it was of some consequence. Sometimes, an official. Sometimes, a private person. And . . . sometimes . . . he was rewarded.

Never, of course, amply.

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But even half a boiled egg is better than none.

Do not, in one way or another, most men and most women sell their eyes?

Pappus sold his ears.

He did not now, anymore than ever, strain forward to listen. He never turned his head to listen; he did not do so now.

Now and then he heard a shuffle. Now and then he heard a step. Now and again he heard someone sit . . . or, having sat a while, stand.

But one thing which he did not hear was a word. Not in any idiom, accent, or tongue. Not one word. To say that to Pappus, having spent so many, many years being both blind and poor—to say, that to him many things must have happened which might be described as *odd*, would be to use a word for which the rhetors have an especial term: let us however merely call this *understatement*. And yet what was going on *now* . . . *here* . . . under the arches of what had once been the Stoa . . . even to Pappus it seemed odd. Aloud he said nothing. To himself he said, *Odd, odd, damned, damned odd: chaps might be so many sleepwalkers . . . so they might. . . . Odd* . . . odd . . . *damned* odd . . . *odd*. . . .

"Well, well: and what's on next?" asked the (*pro tem* and *pro hac vice*) Reverend Sir Zosimus Sulla, of his equally—temporarily and for this occasion only—Reverend Brother.

Who answered, scanning the Bronze Tablets for his cue, "Next? Next is . . . '*Sacrifice to Jupiter Krapuvius.*' "

"Surely you're having me on? 'Jupiter Kra*pu*vius?' Never *heard* of the chap—"

"Yes you have *too* heard of—"

"No I have *not*. Heard of the chap . . . ah, oh, all honor to him all the same, hem, hem, *absit omen* . . . Kra*pu*vius?"

"Should you prefer the alternate forms of *Krapouie* or *Crapouie*, with a *C*, or *Grabouie*, with a *G*?"

"I should not."

"Well, *well*, then: '*Iuve Krapuvi*, a.k.a. Jove and/or Jupiter Grabovius,' etc. etc.; told you a several dozen *times* already!"

"Oh, very *well*, then, if you say so; alien deities which our fathers knew not; naturalized into the Pantheon by Decree of the Senate, I suppose; standard procedure. Very well, very well; pious Aeneas: get along with it like a good chap, do."

They sacrificed to the local Jupiter with salt and meal and fat: then they took off the wreaths of bay leaves which they had just

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put on for the purpose: this required them, of course, once again to pull their togas partly up so as to cover the tops of their heads, a measure eagerly resorted to by Sir Rufus Tiburnus, who was as bald as a coot, and sensitive on the subject; but reluctantly followed by Sir Zosimus Sulla, who had trouble keeping the toga-fold from slipping down over his face altogether, which made him rather sullen: but they both did it.

"What's it say next?"

"Says, '*Pray in a murmur.*' Let us now pray in a murmur. . . . Fact of the matter, old man," Sir Rufus murmured, "I can't *read* those lower lines at *all*. . . . *Sun's* in the wrong direction: can *you* make anything out of it?"

Sir Zosimus seemed at first not to hear this question. Then he gave a very loud hiccup. Then his toga fell over his eyes once again. Then he suddenly got it clear, bent closer to the Bronzen Tablets, peered closely, and said, ". . . altogether in the wrong direction; no; not a thing. *Hujus, cujus, hic, haec, hunc!*" he suddenly announced in a quite loud voice, scattering meal with a sweeping gesture. The Plebs, who were dipping into the quite unexpected largesse of mead with utmost satisfaction, broke off to give very large cheers.

"*That's* the stuff," said Sir Rufus. "Good. Let's give 'em some more of the same. Er—*no!*"

"Why *not?*"

"Wrong *language*. Must have it all in Umbrian. Otherwise: disaffection."

"Piffle. Except for the Quæstor, who dursn't come near us now, as we've frightened him half out of his wits, *none* of the people understand Umbrian anymore, it's utterly obsolete."

"Ah yes. *But they recognize the sound of it when they hear it. . . .*"

"Hm. Yes. Quite. Well. What to do?"

"*Do?* Why, what one has just *done*. Only in *Um*brian . . . you've not forgotten your paradigms, your declensions, your conjugations, *have* you?"

He stared at his Sacred Brother. His Sacred Brother stared back. "I say, what an infernal impudence, one *never* forgets one's paradigms, declensions, and conjugations. . . . Well, well. Onward, then." He cleared his throat loudly; this was perhaps a mistake, as at least a part of the crowd ceased chattering and tippling and began to look on with renewed interest.

Hastily, Sir Rufus launched into, "*Hatu hahtu, mantraklu, mantrahklu, sate sahate, sahta sahata, eturstamu eheturstahamu . . .*"

And, as he paused for breath, Sir Zosimus chimed in with a re-

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sponsive, "*Meersta mersta!*"

"*Turse tuse!*"

"*Farsio fasio—*"

The assembly listened (and drank) with much satisfaction, as the utterly unintelligible (but: *familiar*) sounds of their sacred ancestral language rang though the air. Betimes first one and then the other of the visiting priests would kick a stiffening leg (such motions being taken by the crowd for the prescribed dance of the tripudium); and now and then, either out of keen appetite one or both of the visiting priests would give a turn to the spits on which the sacrificial sows were slowly frizzling; and even the Quæstor—who had been obliged to sample the golden mead by the traditionally suspicious *gens Petronia* to demonstrate that it had not been poisoned—even the Quæstor nodded his head in satisfaction.

("Going very well, it seems, don't you think?" asked Sir T.)

("Going *very* well, it seems, don't you think?" said Sir Z.)

—And then, in, more or less, chorus— "*Hapinaf kapru kumpifiatu Krapuvi, tenzitum tuplak tuva,* (numeral), *atru, testru* (initial *t*), *ustentu* (second *t*), *ententu, antentu, ampentu* (orthographical variant) . . . *Krapuvi, kumiaf* . . ."

("I say, I had forgotten that I remembered so much of it) . . . *krenkratum krikatru* (second *k*) . . ."

("I say, so had *I*: brings back old times, m' pædagogue used to flog me if I got a single syllable wrong, poor dear old chap, what comes next?")

And, off under the portico of what had used to be the Stoa, the ones summoned and sent thither by one whose life was but a dream but whose dreams directed many and many a life, these having within them an order which said that no sword should be swung until the ritual salt should be flung into the fires—these slouched sullenly, shivered sometimes, scowled somewhat . . . now and then . . . or, more often, looked nowhere in particular: and there, only blankly—and waited—

—and waited—

Although the road Peregrine was now on must almost certainly have been one of the narrowest roads ever built by any Imperial Corps of Engineers—and, absolutely certainly, one of the last—it was in every wise other than width a typical Roman road: and ran straight as a line in a geometry, as far as Peregrine could see. He suddenly wished that he could see a lot farther. He wished now,

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very much, that he had taken thought to climb a tree, in order to scout and spy and peer for his Alvish friends . . . or else (he now wished, while he was wishing) that he'd asked the dryad-haunted trees themselves to do so for him. But, as is almost always the case, all the wishes in the world would not now do what he himself had left undone.

Some slight mounds and low hillocks, which alone broke the level monotony of the land, he now observed to be the overgrown ruins of the larger buildings of what had clearly been a much larger place of habitation, ere Roma's woes began: the present hamlet seemed to lie entirely within what was once the Agora . . . and, to a very limited extent still was, if the two old women selling withered parsnips and carrots and the old man offering wine from one jar and oil from another (very bad wine and very bad oil, by the smell of them), could be said to make up the merchants of a market-place. . . .

Huts had been reared up out of rubble and thatch, somewhat sturdier structures out of reclaimed brick; but the center of the place was an architectural melange which would have given Vitruvius mad dreams: mismatched pillars dragged from sundry temples built in sundry centuries in sundry styles, ashlars smooth and ashlars rough (the spaces between them chinked with bad plaster covering worse concrete), and the whole, with its few clustering outbuildings tiled with an infinite variety of tiles, some broken, some merely cracked, many covered with moss which concealed who-knoweth-what. . . .

And, by virtue of such exemplary designs and symbolic insignia as: a fish . . . a *Chi Rho* . . . a serpent bearing a crown with a cross upon it . . . several items of old marble statuary of the male sex placed upside down in lieu of other masonry, each one with its nose and penis carefully smashed off . . . Peregrine knew that what he was seeing (as he plodded in on Dobbin, or whatever the quadruped's name was) was the local heretical church.

If not indeed the local heretical cathedral.

Indeed, many a cathedral in those days was considerably smaller—not that this church was particularly *large*—but it was, after all, merely: *a church*. Father Fufluns had done everything he could think of to have it consecrated a cathedral; he had had it declared a basilica (and everyone knew that a basilica was entitled to become a cathedral); he had held bazaars until its mortgage had been paid off; he had, and at no small cost, managed to have the hamlet elevated to the status of a city: all for nought: were it to have been made a cathedral, the next step would inescapably have

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been for Father Fufluns to have been made a bishop.

And, faced with this necessity, the hierarchy of the Neognostic Heterodox Heretical Church, although known far and wide for its liberal, not to say, latitudinarian, attitude, had unexpectedly (or, perhaps, expectedly) proved coy.

So it remained a *church.*

Lounging around outside and evidently waiting for the service to begin, was what Perry supposed must be the congregation, and a rather scanty congregation it was; and as for its members, many of them bore the almost certain signs of the rather dottier heresies (as distinct from the fine, fierce, fanaticism of the major denominations), such as the look of having been knocked about the head with a whippletree, a sort of miracle in itself, inasmuch as the whippletree had yet to be invented (but in many a cellar many an inventor with lean limbs and lank hair bent over his vise and lathe and bench; did the neighbors enquire—and they *did*—What did he be a-*doin*'? the answer was, oft as not, *He be a-inventin' of the whippletree!*—whereat great was the laughter of the neighbors); but be that as it may.

Perry dismounted, tied his horse to the stump of what had once been a pillar (though whether Doric, Corinthian, or Iambic Pentameter, not enough remained to say) in a temple of an Abomination, found a very small coin in the corner of his purse, purchased a bunch of well-ripened carrots and fed it to the beast; then wandered over to listen to the talk outside the portico. As a birthright Pagan, he had grown up in a religion without very much talk to it (nor, for that matter, very much action), and the ever-ready readiness of Christians to talk about their own religion . . . and to talk and *talk* and TALK . . . always fascinated him. Two of the dottykinses were at it already. He listened.

"What, don't they do Imbibulation where you comes from?" one such asked the other such. His accents were those of Babylonia Philadelphia . . . or, perhaps, of Alexandria Philadelphia, Seleucia Philadelphia, Ptolemy Philadelphia, or any one other of the twenty-seven or thirty-seven cities of the Græco-Roman world, all named, in one way or another, *Philadelphia*: *God* knows why: the foundation for jokes about Philadelphia had already been well-laid.

"Nao, they daon't, and a man could die o' thirst as a result; an full hundred parasangs I've come for it, of a pilrinage, as ye might say; and naow they tell me *this* priest fellow here, he daon't dew it either," said the other.

"Well, don't be in a snit and a haste; for one thing, you gets the

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plenary indulgency for the pilrinage alone; then, too, maybe he *do* do it."

The lean, dehydrated features of the other one lit up. "Ayo, yew think sao?"

The Philadelphian hedged slightly. "Well, I dunno for sure, but no harm in asking; he do Levi*ta*tion—"

"Ayo, he *dew*? Well, well, so then—"

The Philadelphian hedged again. He might have been a lawyer. "Uh, well, only on movable feasts to be sure."

"Well, that be nao problem, today must be a movable feast, for look at that there sacristan a-movin o' the victuals from the kitching tew the parsonage right naow. Sao he *be*: well, naow! I've brought my own water, and if he *dew* dew Imbibulation, he'll change it inter wine. . . ."

Something struck a note in Perry's mind; he was by no means sure what the evidently heretical Sacrament of Levitation involved, but—

A portly, late-middle-aged man now approached and asked him, "And what are *you* here for, young fellow?"

Peregrine thought it best to tell at least part of the truth. "Levitation," he said.

"So'm I," said the citizen, gazing at Perry; "well, Levitation may be heretical, some say it is, but what *I* say, *I* say it jiggles you and joggles you and it lifts you up—'*up*,' get what I mean?—and it starts all the benign humours flowing and it lets them overflow according to their natural pattern; know what I mean?" And he nudged Perry with a portly, middle-aged elbow.

"I do indeed," said Peregrine, this time with less of a joke; he gazed round about in hopes of sight of one of those Christian virgins who (as oft he had been told) defying Pagan overtures, preferred death to dishonor; only maybe not: he could not see a one: at least not a one under some such immense age as perhaps fifty, virgin or otherwise.

So who cared.

And then, next, somehow so swiftly that he was afterwards not able to explain exactly how, he found himself confronting a man in semi-clerical costume (to wit, Basnobio), being relieved by him of one small gold and one large silver coin; of being firmly if gently moved to a certain spot upon a certain tesselated pavement and told, "Stand here. And, whenever you hear me snap my fingers once: *bow*. And when I snap 'em twice, *kneel*." There was an altar. There was a priest. There was no backing out, *now*.

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The priest took up in his hands two fans made of eagles' feathers and he bowed low before the altar and began to pray. Basnobio approached, bowed, set a thurible of smoking incense before him, bowed again, and withdrew. From the sidelines he snapped his fingers, *once*. Peregrine bowed; *twice*, Peregrine knelt. The priest continued to say his prayers in a low incessant voice and by and by he began with gentle movements to fan the incense; and, as the volume of the sacred scented smoke increased, he passed the fans through it . . . once . . . twice . . . thrice. . . . Then he turned and faced Peregrine, kneeling with bowed head before him.

"O Thou Who didst bear the Children of Israel as on eagles' wings," intoned Father Fufluns, "and Who didst deny even unto Solomon knowledge of the way of the eagle in the midst of the air, do Thou, O Ancient of Days and Ruler of the Realms of Air, be pleased to make known unto this Thy child here reverently bowing down before Thee in the manner of Cherubim and Seraphim; Thou Who didst fly upon the wings of the Cherub—"

Faintly, Peregrine, deeply moved in spite of all, faintly Peregrine heard as though from a distance the sound of something between a hiss and a squawk; which he attributed—inasmuch as he attributed it to anything—to aspects of the clamorous denunciations with which one sect of this most multisectarian of religions were wont betimes to afflict upon another: certainly there seemed to be a note of derision: but he returned his thoughts in concentration upon the ceremony; meanwhile the lips of Father Fufluns (crazy, mazy, and dazy he might have been: faithless he was not) were seen to move regardless of the interruption.

"—the Seraph of six wings and with twain he did fly, as revealed to the eye of Thy Prophet—"

Hisssss! Squawwwk!

"—administer with plenary grace this sacred Sacrament of Levitation unto Thy servant," here Father Fufluns waved the fans of eagles' feathers over Peregrine's head with a slow and singular motion upward, as one who with great dignity invites others to get off of the grass—

Peregrine's limbs, which had been in the kneeling position, straightened, and he began to feel an absolute compulsion, he could not say why, to stand on his toes; he rose until his eyes were level with the downcast eyes of Fufluns the Priest, then with the top of the priest's head, then he looked down upon the tonsure (this, too, was heretical, being square in shape, doubtless the influence of the Varangian Guard), then he had to bend a bit to see the priest at all,

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then he ceased to look down at all: and still, . . . slowly, slowly, slowly . . . he rose, and rose, and rose . . .

. . . down below, an increasingly faint voice was heard to intone, ". . . flights of Seraphs and flights of Angels, world without end, forever and ever, Aeons like Angels, Demiurge and Demigorgon . . ." Father Fufluns had slipped over once again into unforgivable Old Gnosticisms: but of course Peregrine did not know; and if he did, he would not have cared.

What he *did* care was about a damned good scan of the *land*: and afar off, to the North, whence Boreas eeke with his rude breath, etc. etc., he saw or he *thought* he saw a line of trees winding their way along the flatness of that flatmost land, and he knew this must indicate a river or anyway a stream . . . in other words: *water*: requisite for women, men, and beasts alike: e'en king and queen must live by nature; plus a small what-was-it? . . . too low-staying to be a puff of smoke, so likelier was a cloud of dust . . . just . . . perhaps just large enough to indicate a group and troop of people of the size he was seeking after, to wit his friends the Alves (or even his enemies, the Baron Bruno's troop); and just as he was straining for a better look he felt himself sinking.

"Hey down there, Reverend Father," he called through cupped hands; "can't you keep me up here a while longer?"

The voice of the priest, as it rose thinly through the air, was tinged, perhaps, less with mysticism than with mere annoyance. "Charismatic chiropractic, boy!" he exclaimed. "Do you take me for a mage or a thaumaturge? I can't perform miracles; down you come as down you must. . . ." But although Peregrine did not rise any higher, neither did he sink any lower; and, the congregation evidently commenting on this phenomenon, the priest by and by looked up. His mouth fell awry and a-gape. Had Perry been a bit closer he might have observed the man swallow. After a moment the priest called up, cupping his own hands, "Have you received Christian Baptism in any form whatsoever, Orthodox, Unorthodox, Heterodox, Heretical, Schismatic, Charismatic, Valid, Invalid, Conditional, Unconditional, Clandestine, or even merely Irregular?" Peregrine thought it best not to answer. "You *haven't*, *have* you, you foolish fellow; well, then, you see what happens: the Sacrament of Levitation in your case is not merely voidable, but *void*. And I wash my hands of it," and here he lightly dipped his digits into a small washbasin provided for the purpose.

The Neognostic Heterodox Heretical Church thought of almost everything.

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What was left of the congregation by this time (a part of it had already fled) uttered sundry small anathemas (major anathemas, as was well-known, could be issued only by members of the episcopate or by lower clergy under special episcopal license), made the sign of the cross in every conceivable manner, and in some few cases stooped to pick pebbles which they tossed up as a sort of surrogate stoning (indeed, only fairly recently, a sect in Syria had advanced the doctrine that stoning might be considered in itself a Sacrament; but they had all been stoned); these congregants may or may not have heard of the law of gravity under that or any other name, but there were, very, very shortly, irritated yelps, in various regional accents, of: "Dawn't play the fool, now, *I* a'n't no fooking 'eretic, bounce another o' them ahf me pate and I'll have at yez, see if I dawn't," and very similar disaffected outcries.

Father Fufluns himself had vanished by now, after having declared the administration of Sacramental Levitation under Suspension until further notice; and his deacon, subdeacon, and acolyte (actually all three offices were held by his assistant, Basnobio, as the practice of Plurality had not yet been officially condemned; though there were rumors it would be taken up at the next General Council, as soon as they had finished with unfinished business, one almost perpetual item of which was the perpetually dubious Doctrine of Caesaropapism, a perenially touchy subject, and one which the current Great White Caesar had been cutting up rough about, threatening to impale the Fathers and Doctors and other Councilmen wholesale if they so much as touched upon it) were—or, to be precise, *was*—dismantling the altar.

"Hey down there! Hey! Hey, I say!" cried Peregrine, shouting down. Basnobio looked up, enquiringly. "Hey, what am I going to *do?*" cried Peregrine.

Basnobio was seldom at a loss for words, that is, Basnobio was seldom at a loss for certain words. "Got any *money?*" he called up.

Perry patted his pouch. "Not an obol," he said.

Basnobio sighed a sigh of genuinely sincere regret. "Then even simony wouldn't help," he answered.

"What am I going to *do?*"

"That's *your* problem," said the fellow, getting on with his work; then, a mote of humor floating into his mind, with slight upward canting of his head, added, "You might, if you were any kind of a Christian, pray for an angel to help you, *haw!*" And, without giving the suggestion or jest the merit of even a second *haw*, started off with his sacred burden into the sacred precincts.

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Peregrine, who had gradually and uneasily become aware of rising winds, thought the winds were tossing words around; or was there an echo? Certainly he heard the words "**An angel! An angel!**" being repeated . . . shouted . . . screamed . . . by those who still stayed in view on the grounds below . . . saw Father Fufluns thrust his head out of the parsonage window and hastily withdraw it, saw the head of Basnobio appear in the same place, instantly vanish, saw and heard the window being shuttered and heard it being bolted . . . he saw, Peregrine, a shadow the most strange, and he heard—he was sure he heard—the beating of mighty wings. "Idiots, *that is no angel!*" one voice he clearly heard, he thought it might be that of the portly middle-aged man with the querulous prostate or whatever associated problems; "*that is a*——"

The winds and other sounds swept his words away; one of the other sounds being of course that of the beating of mighty wings, and another sounded, oddly, like a cry of, "**Ballast! Ballast!**"

Perry smelt something very much like a fish dinner in rather early stages of preparation, and something mighty strong took hold of him on each side, but in no way painfully, something . . . some*things* . . . folded deftly under each of his arms, and a rather familiar voice said, almost, if not quite, in his ears, "Well, me little biped, and aren't you one of old Alf's straggle and stirpes?"

Perry dared look up. "*Smaragderos!*" he cried.

"That same," said that same. "Have you anything to fix, have you anything to mend, have you any little tricks to which a dragon might attend?"

After a while, things in the hamlet returned to something like order. The priest and his assistant had climbed out from under the bed and were now discussing recent events.

"What would be next, *oh* yes: next thing is to let me see about casting out dæmons!" said Father Fufluns, belting his tiffin.

Several score dæmons, who had been lazying around, pricked up their batlike little ears at this, and began a squeaking chorus of, "Oh, for pity's sake, do late a dæmon *be* for once and a change, carntcher?"

. . . In a moment more, the dæmons, utterly cast out, were blearily blinking their weeny rufous eyes in the bright light of the out-of-doors and rather sullenly flapping their wings and drifting downwind looking for someone or something else to go and possess, even as it might be an herd of swine; though even there, as one or two darkly remarked, one could no longer be sure. . . .

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The dæmons, utterly cast out, were blearily blinking their weeny rufous eyes in the bright light of out-of-doors.

Smaragderos was not in the least bit hostile; nor was he, he made it clear, in the least whit willing to risk himself by taking Perry to anyplace where Perry wanted to go. And of course, Perry at the moment wanted only to go wherever his friends King Alf and Prince Buck might be . . . wherever that might be. . . . "Precious fool I should be going *there*, wherever *there* may be, where *they* are, I mean . . . until, anyway, they become used to the changed order of events, that is: so there!"

"*Which* changed order of events?"

"The changed order of events intendant upon the roaring flames of the dragons' revolution," was the answer, with a touch of reproof; and at this the dragon issued forth a whoosh of breath and flame, ending on a slightly fishy belch, and the words, "See what I mean?"

"Oh yes, you mean that henceforth *you* are keeping the treasures and *they* can be keeping the trash fish," Peregrine said, recollecting what had occurred back at Alf Big House; namely the curious incident whence had come the flight of himself, his friends, and all,

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what time Smaragderos had played for keeps that which previously had been little more than a game.

"Ex*act*ly," said Smaragderos.

"Then where *will* you take me, then?"

But the dragon implied that this question was wrongly couched. "I am not 'taking you' anywhere," said he. "I am going where *I* am going, which is nowhere dependent upon where *you* want to go, and *you* are not going as a passenger: you are coming along as ballast, a fact which you will simply have to accept. . . . Drat these winds . . . *Eh* . . . ?"

Inasmuch as Perry had not asked a further question, he had no answer to supply to the "*Eh*?" He saw something long and black and bifurcated shoot forth and wobble; this was several times repeated, and he realized that it was Smaragderos's tongue which he was seeing; then, once again, Smaragderos said, "*Eh!*" —but this time it was no question. The dragon seemed puzzled; the dragon seemed displeased. "*Drat!*" said the dragon. And hissed some susurration, sibilant of surprise and of displeasure.

"Hadn't heard that in *years!*" said the dragon, as though to himself. "What can it *mean?*"

Peregrine did not feel able to answer anymore this time than the last; he could wonder at the dragon's wonder, but he could do no more. However, as he watched their shadows on the earth beneath, he did become aware of something on which he felt he might certainly comment. "Aren't we changing directions?" he asked.

"Of *course* we're changing directions! We *must!* And insomuch as we must, off we go, as go we must, little though any of this may please, little Christian."

"Who, me?"

Plains, hills, dales, vales, here and there some strips of plowland.

"Yes, you. —Why? Do you notice anyone else up here with us?"

Smaragderos had for long been holding Perry's whole body more or less horizontally and with all four limbs. The notion of speaking impertinently to a dragon was not one which would have naturally occurred to him . . . Smaragderos was after all only the second dragon he had ever seen in his whole life and this was only the second time he had ever seen Smaragderos . . . and, certainly, at this height, sarcasm, even irony, was not to be thought of. Smaragderos might certainly be, as King Alf had asserted, piscivorous: But he need, after all, not *eat* Perry.

He need only drop him.

"Compared to your own dragonic greatness," he said, choosing his

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words with care, "I am certainly little. But I am not a Christian."

"Well now, I must say, you do speak nice. —You're *not?*"

"No, I'm not."

A small silence. "I used to have some very nice Jewish friends," the dragon said.

What *did* Peregrine believe? He thought aloud. "My old Father used to say, 'The gods—which is to say an allegorical expression of the infinite attributes of the First Cause—' "

"Well, *that*'s nice, too. . . . Who's your Father?"

Perry said, "He's called King Palindrome, but his name is actually King Paladrine, and he is, actually, the last Pagan king in Lower Europe."

At the word "king" Smaragderos went very slightly stiff. Then asked, "He doesn't play tricks with *dragons*, does he?"

"No, never. Poor sweet old fellow. I hope all's well with him."

He felt Smaragderos relax; the dragon did not at once reply; it might have seemed that he was turning something over in his mind. Then he said, "Well . . . I suppose as we must do this, we might as well do this in style. . . . I can't go down. Not now. Not just yet. So we must do something in the middle of the air, but don't be frightened, now, do you *hear*?"

Perry heard. And asked, "Do what? Frightened of what?"

"*You*'ll see. Just don't struggle, is all."

Peregrine, in what followed, strove hard to keep all this in mind; and, fortunately, he succeeded.

"*Mers, teitu, nurpener, sumel, rufru* (I've always detested these irregular verbs.) . . ."

"(Sshh, these aren't verbs.)"

"(Don't you sshh me; well, I've always detested them anyway.)"

Together: "*Aterafust ahatripursatu ahtrepuratu, arpes arepes tertu titu!*"

From the seats round about the one side of the sacred precincts where the seats had not fallen in, one of the Conscript Fathers observed, at large, "Well, one must declare that these visiting priests do speak the Old Language uncommonly well."

And behind him, one of the Plebs said, "Ah, there ain't nothink like a eddication; my old gaffer, *he could write his own name!* And many's the time he says to me, 'Bobus,' says he, 'when I puts my sig*nay*ture on a dockyment, there can't be no con*tro*versy!' "

Sir Zosimus, breaking into Latin: ". . . 'gh normally becomes h *H* initially and medially, cf. Oscan *ee-hiianasúm* . . ."

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"(Psst: I don't think that part comes into this part.)"

"(I should think not, too.)"

"(Well, why did you *say* it, then?)"

"(Because it's so *absurd, that's* why: *ee-hiianasúm*, indeed! Hee-hee!)"

"(Jove! I believe that you are tiddly, my Learned Brother!)"

"(Fine one to talk; I believe that you are tiddly, too, my Burnéd Lover!)"

Overcome with laughter, the two old priests *pro tem* fell into one another's arms and lurched and staggered round about, narrowly escaping falling into the barbecue pits; Sir Zosimus, having barked his shin, held on to his fellow as he hopped about on one leg.

A Pleb: "What be they a-doin of *now*?"

A Conscript Father: "Dancing the *tripudium*, on three feet, as is requisite, of course."

The wind shifted, bringing the sacred smell of roasting sacrificial pig to the seats, and producing once again a well-nigh universal murmur of, "It's that Old Time Religion, and it's good enough for me!"

As Sir Rufus and Sir Zosimus paused for breath, the Quæstor approached with a manner mingled of dignity and caution, bowed gravely to both of them, gravely turned one of the Bronze Tablets around, bowed again, and a few steps withdrew.

The two consulted.

"What's all this about?"

"He thinks we've finished up that side of the Tablet, so he's turned it round so we can finish up the other side as well. Hmmm. Oh! Jolly good! The letters on this side are *much* larger!"

"Oh I say what a blessing. Those blasted paradigms were getting to me. . . . What's it say? Ah. Says, *The Senior Brother*, or 'Brother Superior,' distinction without a difference, *now sounds the Summons and then the General Assembly*; who's the Brother Superior, I forget—"

"*I* am."

"Oh. I thought *you* were."

"I *am*—"

"Well, then, get *on* with it, stead of just standing there like a crane on one foot. . . . I say, *no*, it is *I* am who am standing here like a crane on one foot. Oh well. *Tch*!"

The Quæstor now announced, as loudly as possible, "Pray silence, Citizens of New Iguvium in Nova Umbria, whilst Their Holinesses the Most Reverend and Right Reverend the Sacred Brothers pro-

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nounce the Summons! Augurs, man your staffs! Clean quarterings, port and starboard, fore and aft!"

It was—or was about to be—a great moment for the augurs, for their collective status, once very high, had, under Christian proscription, fallen very low indeed; indeed, for some time now, instead of publicly and honoredly reading the auspices and omens on which the welfare of State and City might well depend, they had for the most part and in order to keep body and soul together, been reduced to reading palms, giving advice to the lovelorn, and, in some several sad instances, even to sweeping crossings, or peddling hot-cakes from door to door: it was damnably difficult keeping them hot, too, and, in fact, they usually did not sell very well at all. As a result, the characters of one or two of the augurs had been perhaps somewhat corrupted: one such was even to be heard, in a mutter which others pretended not to hear, clandestinely observing the weather (". . . strong headwinds from north northwest . . .") before the actual sounding of the Summons: which was not the thing at all, *very* bad form, and enough to have softened the hard heart of even Cato the Elder, whose coarse comment that "He did not understand how two augurs could pass each other without bursting out laughing," had never been forgiven by them: and never would.

But the Summons had already begun, and was even now "*summoning birds which fly* [no one would, after all, summon an *ostrich*], *winged creatures which fly, to fly from the east, to fly from the south, from the west, from the north, from and to the right and left; to provide omens, to supply auspices, wisdom, counsel, guidance and advice: we summon you: we summon you: we summon you: may your presences be favorable. We adjure, conjure, compel you; hearken, therefore, and appear. . . .*"

And, in the ringing silence which followed, Sir Rufus breathed into Sir Zosimus's ear, "Awesome powers, these." Sir Zosimus nodded.

But neither one really understood just how awesome those powers really were.

The only maps with much pretense to accuracy or precision in the matter of exact boundaries were cadastral maps: it was certainly essential to know where one ward or one municipium began and left off, that is, if one expected to collect taxes and not arguments; hence such details as ". . . *and from the grey dovecote to the blasted oak, and thence at a line constituting the brook called . . .*" well, whatever. . . . The boundaries between nations were designated in theory

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by such things as mountains and deserts, though in practice much likelier by battles. Immense battles had been fought, and with immense losses of lives, to be commemorated with immense monumental inscriptions (some of these illustrated in great and ghastly detail): but nowadays very often the scenes of such triumphs—if that is what they may rightfully be called—were observed chiefly by the hedgehog and the owl, to whom the matter of how many human heads, hands, feet, noses, and genitalia had been severed was probably one of great indifference.

Since the division and redivision of the Roman Empire, the incursions of the Barbarians; the civil wars and the wars between the States, the rival generals, emperors, and caesars; the religious persecutions, and all the rest of it—since all this had begun, and still continued to continue, the matter of what boundaries lay where and who ruled over which was not so certain as it had once been; and the idea that it might soon (or ever) be once and for all resolved was not one which found ready acceptance. Baron Bruno, for example, a man who was not often perplexed, was not only not certain that he was still in his own High King's domains and dominions, he was no longer exactly certain where he was at all. He kept his eyes always open, but the fact now was that his eyes were growing heavier and heavier. He was not even aware when they closed.

He and his two cavalrymen and three foot-sloggers might well, once they entered into the circle of rune-thorns, have walked themselves, widdershins, to death, without once waking up to observe the fact. They were, in fact, "*where no ass brayed, and no cock crew*"—a place most dangerous to be, as dangerous as cold iron; it was unknown to them that, a good league thence, and (as it were) underneath a mountain, one solitary smallholder managed still to till his few strips of grainland, cultivate his small truck garden, prune his grove of trees and press himself enough oil and wine for his own needs. There was nothing idyllic or arcadian about this life, the labor was immense, wolves and bears had begun to appear—but—and this was his greater fortune—in many years: *no soldiers*. His greater infortune was to have met a boar whilst he went to fetch water; the boar ripped him from knee to navel, and after that his luck, like his lifeblood, ran out very quickly.

The wolves ate his sheep and goats, and the foxes and weasels got most of his hens. The cock flew up first into one tree and then into another and thence into another, and another; and the ass simply wandered away, browsing upon the tough thistle and the tender grass alike; the feral dog which thought to bring him down was

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driven off with flying hooves and rib-cracking kicks. There was no particular reason *why* the cock and the ass should have gone in the direction they both did, though by different ways and at different speeds, save perhaps that this way, lying down-slope, was easier to follow. That either one ever actually reached the old road, and what happened to them afterwards, did they or did they not, does not matter: it matters only that, within hearing of a certain place upon that old road, the cock crew . . . and the ass brayed. . . .

And that, of course, broke the spell.

The Baron and his men, much though they had slept the whilst they walked in circles, were obliged to sleep e'en more, by reason of their great fatigue.

And after that, went on.

Whither they went, they knew not; the men would have by all or any means returned, but to gainsay Baron Bruno was not possible and he held no councils of war. Or of any other kind. Two faces danced always before his red, red eyes, were his eyes now open or closed: one was a face even uglier than his own, and it snarled and growled at him, saying, *What! You are still 'ere? Harms! Orse! Presue! Fetch! Begorn!* and the other face was nothing ugly at all, the other face was damnably comely, and this other face said no word to him, he saw it only in profile, but when he saw it—and he saw it half of always—another voice spoke when he saw this other face, perhaps there had once been two such voices, both of women . . . young women . . . but now they were but one voice. Saying, *That is him . . . Peregrine . . .*

Meanwhile, Gaspar the Dreamer dreamed his dreams . . . which is to say, being Gaspar the Dreamer, he dreamed the dreams of other folk . . . and dreamed them *for* them. . . . And, often . . . very, very often . . . that which he dreamed did come to pass. But dreams are unlike propositions in geometry; although they may be fully as true, they may not be measured, they may not be demonstrated: sometimes the parallel lines of dreams meet in infinity. And sometimes they do not meet at all.

Assassins waited for Peregrine. Soldiers pursued him. A petty king and a petty court, dismayed, wished he were with them. A princess missed him. It was of course true that she was a young, a very young princess. She knew little of the greater world and almost nothing of its events. But, what she knew, she knew. The mimworms had not lied to her nor to her sister. "It all be that dragon," she whispered. And her sister whispered back, "It be. It be."

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Sir Zosimus Sulla was fretful. "Me voice is almost gone," he croaked. "I couldn't read another line of Umbrian just now to save me life. Me foot still hurts where I bumped it, then. And no birds sing. Not so far as *I* can see. Or *hear*. So what shall we *do?*"

Sir Rufus Tiburnus was almost as played out, but he had the benefits of a military career, and, as any good military commander—any good Pagan one, that is—he had had practical experience with the matter of recalcitrant birds of omen. "When in doubt, scatter grain," he said. "Where *is* the grain? Ah. Your side. *Your* pidjin, then. Scatter *grain*, I say."

Grain was scattered.

"The augurs will simply go *mad*," said Sir Rufus, rubbing his gouty old hands. He seemed to look forward to this. Well, it had been a trying day, a *very* trying day. And it was not yet over.

The birds, on seeing the grain being scattered . . . and not all of them were far-sighted, but those who were not, of course observed the movements of those who were . . . at once began to fly towards the sacred precincts, and, in a moment, the middle upper air was filled with their cries:

"Crikey! Crikey! Corn, corn, corn!"

"Psst! Psst! Seed! Seed, seed, seed! Spelt, spelt, spelt!"

"Bugs? Bugs? Bug-bug-bug-a-bug-bug-bug-bug!"

Instantly, and exactly as prophesied by Sir R. Tiburnus, the augurs *did* go mad—or seemed to—and, in defiance of the traditional rule of strict silence whilst the omens were being taken, as traditionally broke the strict silence, and rushed from their seats with eager cries of, "*Ibs*, I observe a starling in the west, a crow in the west! A woodpecker in the east!" and, "*Dibs, I* observe a woodpecker in the east, a magpie in the east! Divine messengers! Dibs, dibs!"

"Dibs! Dibs! Dibs!"

One of the augurs, Cassandros by name, who had always been considered, well, a little bit *odd*, said nothing whatsoever, but continued staring, with one hand shading his pale, pale eyes; no one paid *him* any mind.

And, of course, every augur carried a special staff with the aid of which he took his bearings; it was of the utmost importance not only to observe the kind and the number of birds (for every schoolboy knows the story about Romulus and Remus and the vultures), but from which quarter of the heavens they appeared: thus, the staff. And, as the birds came flocking in, all the augurs began waving their staffs and then holding them up to quarter the heavens, bumping into one another, commencing elaborate apologies, breaking

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them off to take fresh auspices. It was quite a spectacle; a show, in short, every bit as interesting as the one which the visiting priests had been putting on, and it was just as well so many birds had (with some small assistance) appeared to answer the Summons, for the sacrificial swine were not yet entirely cooked: and the populus, with idle time on its collective hands, might else have chosen to exercise its quasi-traditional right to riot.

And now one of the augurs, whose eye-sight was perhaps not equal to his enthusiasm, cried, "*Dibs* I see an hoopoe in the middle-west!"

Now, everyone knew about starlings, crows, woodpeckers, and magpies; such birds were seen even when no official auspices were being taken . . . but —*a hoopoe?*

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed one of the Conscript Fathers; "I haven't heard of a hoopoe being observed since the Consulate of . . . of . . . name's on the tip of my tongue: *Caligula's horse?*"

Excitement is always contagious; many of the Plebs took up the subject with shouts of "A 'oopoe! A 'oopoe! Why, us 'asn't never *seed* no 'oopoe!"

In little more than a moment the rumor had swept a part of the throng that a *hippo* had been seen in the middle-west: the effect of this was tremendous; it affected even the few Christians who had been lurking round about, and, having been solemnly warned by their bishops that the eye which so much as *looked* willingly upon a Pagan ceremony would go blind, were observed now and then furtively peeping . . . with one hand over one eye . . . just in case. "A hippo?" cried one such to another. "Surely it be the beast Behemoth of the Book of Job!"

"Nay, mayhap it be the Beast of the Apocalypse!"

Such distinctions did not affect the citizenry; if there were—and had not many of them just *heard* there were—a hippo anywhere around, that same many damned well intended to see it! *Where was it?* And, as the augur who had thought he had espied a hoopoe, or a*n* hoopoe, in the middle-west, ran wildly in that direction waving his augurial staff, he was of course followed by lots and lots of other augurs, jealous of such an auspicious (or, as it might prove to be, *in*auspicious) sighting: waving *their* augurial staffs: the mob followed the augurs.

The augur who had gotten the head start ran at full speed, closely followed by many of his fellows, directly along the west wing of the Stoa.

Where, as we have seen, waited a several sundry men of sullen slumber: though now, as it were, full-wide-awake. And armed.

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Meanwhile, and as the rest of the augurs who had stayed behind gathered together, chattering like so many birds themselves, to tot up their totals and calculate their quarterings and consult their official standards and their personal notebooks—all, of course, with the intention of arriving at a consensus of *what it all really meant*—the augur Cassandros did not join them in this, and, instead, continued to gaze . . . and then to mumble . . . and then (his voice was old but his voice was strong) to declare what he himself was sighting, to wit:

"In the east, divine messengers!"

"Well, let's see, now, three starlings, four crows, eleven woodpeckers: now, that makes—"

"Beg pardon, but inasmuch as I myself *clearly* sighted no less than *six* starlings—"

"Double vision, that's what you've got."

"Well, I simply beg your pardon, I do *not* have double vision, and so—"

"In the east, divine messengers!"

". . . and four magpies in the south . . ."

"In the east, divine messengers!"

The other augurs paused. The other augurs looked up. The other augurs looked at each other. One of the other augurs asked, "Who is *that* and what is he *say*ing?"

One of the other augurs gazed up and around long enough to identify the lone speaker, then looked back, with an "Oh, just crazy old Cassandros again: says, '*In the east, divine messengers*' . . . Now: —and four magpies in the south—"

"Yes, but let's have a look to the east—what? Cass is crazy? Well, Cass may *be* crazy, as you call it, but it is after all a well-known fact that those whom the gods would inspire, they first make mad. So—"

So all the other augurs got up, though not without on the parts of some a great deal of perhaps unseemly grumbling. "You see. I could have *told* you. *Nothing* in the east. Not a single bloody bird—"

"In the east, divine messengers!"

The winds blew through the snowy beard of old Cassandros, and tossed his hoary locks aloft and abroad; his staff was pointed firmly towards the quarter of the heavens called the *east*, although, of course, which was *east* or *west* or *north* or *south* depended largely on the season of the year, the sun—unconquered as the sun undoubtless is (save during eclipses: another story)—the sun rises not nor sets always throughout any year from exact fixed place to an-

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other, but somewhat visibly moves its rising-place and its going-down-place as the swift seasons roll . . . Cassandros, a veteran observer of the heavens from his very earliest years, continued to point with his staff firmly towards the legal, or current, east.

"He's not only mad, he's *blind!* I tell you, there's not so much as a sparrow nor a *cock*-chicken in the east!"

There was a silence; they might all, the augurs, have then sat down, and gone back to their sacred calculations: somehow, they did not. Something hung in the air, unseen. Something hung in the air, unsaid. And, so, finally, one of them said it.

"Yes . . . but . . . you know . . . not every divine messenger need *be* a *bird* . . ."

A moment more they thought on this: gainsayable it was not; then every pair of eyes turned once again. And one voice, and *not* that of Cassandros, was heard to say, "Yes . . . it might mean . . . lightning. . . ."

To the east, they looked, and long they looked. Then one and then another said, "I see it . . .", "Yes, *I* see it, too . . .", "But . . . at *this* season of the year?"

And not one cried *Ibs*, nor did one, not even one, cry *Dibs*.

But one *did* say, and very gravely indeed he said it: "If that indeed is lightning, it is like no lightning I ever saw before. . . ."

And, indeed, this lay beyond argument.

Some ways away, though of course still within the sacred precincts, Sir Zosimus Sulla cleared his throat. "Hem, I say, *hem*, my august and sacred brother—"

His august and sacred brother (who had been trying to recall—and to recite—a very old and very bawdy song about the allegedly bisexual habits of Great Caesar) said, with annoyance, "I wish to Jove you would for once and all cease interrupting me, *am* I the Brother Superior or am I *not* the Brother Superior . . . oh dash it all, very well, what *is* it?"

"I seem to espy a dragon in the east."

"Well, you've simply no *business* to be espying a dragon in the east; who made *you* an augur? Pay no attention, and perhaps it will go away . . . if indeed you do see one, which I doubt . . ."

"Well, you can bet your sweet senatorial buskins I *do* see one, and he's breathing flames of fire like anything."

"Oh demnition, so you do. So he is. So do I. So. . . . Well, we *did* summon not merely *birds*, you know; we *did* summon '*winged creatures which fly*,' didn't we?"

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Slowly, *slow*ly, slowly, the two aging friends arose. And faced the east. "Yes, we *did*," said the Rev. Sir Zosimus. "We certainly *did*."

"Didn't know our own powers."

"No, we *did*n't. . . . *Awe*some powers, these. . . ."

The silence seemed to cover not alone the entire City of New Iguvium, but the entire State of Nova Umbria; this silence was, now, first gradually, then increasingly, disturbed, and then loudly broken by the sound of the beating of great wings.

Smaragderos came down and down and down, he circled, he rose, he descended, he went into a glide . . . a long, slow, *very* slow glide. . . .

The augurs (those who had stayed put) were probably a deal more stunned than the Plebs who had stayed put (for, just as not all the augurs had believed in the hoopoe, not all the Plebs had believed in the hippo); the augurs, after all, had expected to see, in general, only what they had already seen, viz. *birds*; the others, after all, had been prepared to see, well, *any*thing . . . including, why not, a dragon. . . .

"Someone's a-*ridin'* on it," said one of the Plebs.

"Them Christians can't git up nothin' like this," said another.

(Off and away, one of the Christians said to another of the Christians, "This be certainly none other than The Great Red Dragon and The Woman Clothed With The Sun—")

(Said the second Christian to the first Christian, "No, it be'n't. For one thing, it be'n't *red*—")

("What? Does you deny the evidence of things not seen? The difference a-tween the accidents and the incidents of matter? How does you know that underneath that outer green *it be'n't really red?*")

(This was indeed a poser; still, the doubter did not immediately give up: "But *that* ain't no woman—he've got a beard on him!")

("And how does you know he be'n't a bearded woman?")

("I says that's absurd!")

("And I says, what *I* says, *I* says, I believes it a-cause it *be* absurd!")

(Such logic was remorseless as it was irresistible; they fell on their four knees, and recited, first, the Kyrie, and then the Creed, both with and without the Filioque Clause, as approved and as disapproved by the Council of Doura-Europos, which was, of course, not in Europe at all: which of course merely added to the Mystery.)

Sir Rufus, finally overcome by what he was seeing, sat down abruptly; he felt obliged to speak, but, being without words fresh and appropriate, fell back upon other, older words, to wit the Umbrian *exempla*: "*. . . panta putrespe pisipumpe*," he

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murmured—breaking off abruptly to snap, "Stop that silly giggling at *once*, d'you hear?"

("Can't *help* it, 'pisipumpe!' —*al*ways used to make me giggle!")

("Chap is riding a bloody *drag*on! —I shall never allow me name to be placed with yours in the urn for lots-drawing again if I can possibly help it: *a man your age!* —Immortal gods, *rid*ing a *drag*on!) (—it is merely cognate with Latin *quicumque*, the *centum-pentum* change, or what do they call it; every schoolboy knows . . .) (*A drag*on! —*Puntes, pumperias, prusikurent, sukatu, umtu*—)

("Well, what if he *is?* Horse, hippo, dragon: with taste and scent, no argument. . . . Oh I don't be*lieve* it!") ("See for yourself: *Drag*on . . . *Chap.*") ("Don't *mean* that. . . . 'Umtu?' ") (" 'Umtu.' ")

("Well, I shall simply throw up me hands at this, then. The syllables *umtu* have no place in any language with a claim on logical, not to say, civilized, speech . . . or do I mean, 'civilized, not to say, logical' . . . ?")

The two elders faced each other, for the moment entirely forgetful of the fact that a man riding on a dragon continued, in ever-diminishing concentric circles, to soar downwards in their direction. " 'Umtu,' " said Sir Rufus—ignoring also the fact that much of their audience had gone rushing off from the scene of the ceremony— " 'in *umtu*, where we should expect *k* as in *fiktu*, or, in other words, Latin *ninctu*, the preservation of the labial (implied by the *m*) must result from analogy with the unsyncopated forms of the present stem, such as *umbo*, Latin *unguo*?' The book *says* so. —And besides: my throat is very sore!"

"So's mine. *Finis Fandi!*" And, so saying, Sir Zosimus dipped his hands into the vessel of sacred salt and cast both handsful into the glowing coals: it flared up beautifully.

This was to have been the signal for those summoned by Gaspar the Dreamer to rush forth and slay: slay, particularly, anybody on the list, including, *most* particularly, *Peregrine*. . . . However. For one thing, the so-called signal, given so spontaneously by poor old Sir Zosimus, was not supposed to have been given quite yet: so, as far as *that* went, the assassins were not prepared quite yet . . . although they had *been* prepared, of course, to slay anybody . . . anywhere . . . there are such men everywhere and everywhen: Gaspar had chosen them well, if such an ill purpose can be spoken of as *well*: but Gaspar, of course, had an excellent choice of choices: *for he knew what such men dreamed.* As he knew what such dreams were dreamed by which such men. . . .

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Further—

The men of sullen slumber had begun to get them up, in response to the multi-colored flickering of the salt in the fire-pits, but, though they knew this not particularly: that the salt had been cast too soon: still, something and somewhat they knew was quite not in order: so, though they rose, they rose not in order, nor neither in precision. And somewhat uncertain they seemed, there in the moldering Stoa, beginning to draw forth weaponry from neath their ragged, stainèd cloaks; just then—

There rushed in their direction first the one augur who had thought he had espied "an hoopoe," running willy-nilly-wildly and waving his augurial staff in order to quarter it properly; he was followed by more-or-less many other augurs, in hopes of doing the same (in all their minds, some future scene: "Grandfather, is it true you once espied an hoopoe?" "My child: it *is* true. *Sic* [et cætera]" . . .)—all waving *their* staffs—or, if you prefer, staves: with taste and scent, no argument—eh?—this had formed no part of any plans imprinted on the minds of these men of sullen slumber.

Further:

Peregrine's face had certainly been imprinted on their minds, not alone his naming having been inscribed upon the boards of beechwood with the baleful signs: but they had expected (without indeed having consciously so described it to themselves) to have seen the face—and figure—of Peregrine at eye-level—

Whereas *now! Where* was Peregrine's face? Atop, of course, Peregrine's body; but this body (mortal, as be all bodies) was now mounted atop the body of a dragon, and quite some distance above where they had expected it to be—javelins they might cast, useless though 'twere——

Meanwhile there came running towards them, by accident (but *they* knew this not) an horde of strangers waving what to some were mere staves or wands, but to othèrs seemed as clubs—

The assassins, forgetful of, or unable to pause and to reinterpret all instructions . . . it was growing late, both late and cold . . . and seeing (and within *reach!*) wild-eyed strangers dashing down upon them (so it seemed; of course the augurs saw these strangers no more than they saw the alas non-existent *hoopoe*), at once drew their weapons.

Hard upon these augurs came, one moment afterwards, a very large part of the assembled citizenry of Nova Umbria, all in full cry, under the impression, alas equally illusory, that there was hereabouts to be seen an *hippo*: what they *did* see were strangers draw-

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ing weapons against the augurs. Uproar ceased at once; there was a horrified silence, followed by a roar of rage from the throng: to draw one's weapon against an augur was a sacrilege of the first class.

Also, a for once perfectly legitimate cause for a riot . . .

As one of the Plebs, a bath-porter by trade: *and* a rather rough trade it was generally considered: as he now put it: "It be anyway a good arf-a-hower afore them sow-pigs and boar-pigs be praparly roasted; **SACRILEGE! SACRILEGE!**"

Barrel-staves, bung-starters, wagon-tongues, forge-hammers, wash-poles, and other rude objects were more-or-less instantly converted into weaponry; and those who had none such managed without too much difficulty to pry up the stone seats of the Stoa, the paving-blocks of such nearby squares and streets as were paved, and sundry chunks of marble from the shops of such as made gravestones and/or graven images. The Conscript Fathers, mead dribbling down their mustard-stained mouths, mustaches, and beards, stood upon the benches and urged on the Plebs with shouts and gestures; *they* had no idea what it was all about, but they knew their duties when they saw them. (Besides, it was safer that way.)

And, overhead, each time the assassins seemed about to have the *levée-en-masse* cornered, down from the sky came Peregrine mounted upon Smaragderos (the latter hissing and squawking in absolute ecstasy), and driving the would-be manslayers away from each coign (as it has been termed) of vantage.

Meanwhile, and not so very much afar off, plodded with relentless tread Baron Bruno and his five followers: of a sudden the Baron pucked up his nose and sniffed the air with hairy nostrils; "I smells 'em!" said he. Adding, "For 'e smell o' that Sphynx!"

The men leered and smirked at each other at this; then they too began to sniffle and to snuffle. One, either bolder by nature, or dazed by fatigue and so made heedless, added, "Us smells supthing else, *too,* Boss—"

"And *what?*" Sign of something, that the Baron did not, in the absence of some such phrase as, "Leave to speak, Boss?" smack the speaker with his mace.

"Dunno for sure, Boss. Supthing like a biggish snake . . . or as 't might be, a fish a-ginning to go pong . . . Boss. . . ."

Further sniffs, snuffs, murmurs of assent. The Baron tested the air. The Baron growled. The Baron said nought. The six marched on. Suppose they had managed, somehow, to get up a gallop. With

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the foot-soldiers riding postern . . . Suppose they had gotten there so much sooner than they did. Suppose they had added their force . . . small: but drilled: disciplined: to the motley small swarm of madmen. . . .

All history might have been different. Not so, that it might?

Might.

The set-to in the Stoa took perhaps ten minutes.

The sudden and comparative quiet within the sacred precincts had acted much as might the removal of props, from the two knight-priests. They found themselves sitting side by side, each upon a Bronze Tablet. A further sacrilege? A *nice* point. *Quis*, however, *custodiet*. And all that. No chap upon a dragon now in sight, they did not bethink them of a chap upon a dragon.

"Whom do you fancy in the first race in the Hippodrome on Opening Day?" asked Sir Zosimus.

"Fancy the Pinks," said Sir Rufus.

Sir Zosimus scoffed. "What! The *Pinks!* Why, their horses can't pull chariots for *beans!*"

"Oh what rot! —furthermore, they've got Rumbustius driving in the first race on Opening Day—look at his record—" By the universal standards of chariot-racing, those in the Hippodrome in the Capital of the Central (or Middle) Roman Empire were pretty small parsnips: but at least they were simonly and purely occasions for *chariot-racing*, and not for religious rivalry and riotry.

"Ah yes; *grant* you his *rec*ord: but whilst he was building up his *rec*ord, chap wasn't driving for the *Pinks*, he was driving for the *Puces* . . . you had better pray to Jupiter Pluvius, my advice, bunch of mudders, the Pinks' horses are: *my* advice—I *say*. Most everyone seems to have left the stands!"

"Shouldn't wonder; probably all gone to use the pissoir."

"Yes yes, shouldn't wonder. . . . Speaking of which . . ."

A special pair of conveniences had been rigged up for the convenience of the visiting clergy: instead of the usual second-hand pottery jars demoted for base usage when the tops had broken, these were brandnew. New or old, of course, the contents were sold by Government to syndicates of tanners and fullers who used them to treat leather and wool; when a certain Monarch of the old and undivided Empire had had this brilliant idea, one bold courtier dared comment, "Smelly way to make money!" —the Imperial Prince of course had said *Pecunia non olet*, Money's got no smell. . . . The jests of monarchs and their heirs tend to be both rare and very much appreci-

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ated . . . particularly at the time they are uttered; some stand the test and taste of time much better than others.

". . . five to three, then, on the Pinks. Done?"

". . . dear chap, it would be simply taking sweetmeats from a baby . . . well, very well, then: *done!*"

". . . we shall see about *that*. . . . Hmm, everyone seems to be coming back. . . ."

"What? Oh. So they do. Best *we*'d be getting back, then, too. Well, well, be over soon enough."

It had all been over in about ten minutes.

Sir Zosimus, moved by no particular rubric to do so, but simply because he liked having once done so, and so without much thinking, decided to do so again—Sir Zosimus once again dipped his hands into the vessel of sacred salt and cast both handsful onto the glowing coals; as before, it flamed up in a lovely display of multicolored flame. The returning throng, observing the blazing colors of the salt, at once forgot all about the bloody business it had done, this being the way of throngs; and for that matter, all about sundry other recently observed events ("What silly arf-arsed hoaf claimed e'd saw a *ippo*? Bloke carn't tell a ippo from a dragon . . . or vicery-varsery! —*Ull*o! *Salt!* Us must be coming in at a good part; ustle and get a praper place—").

"There: now we've all had time out to pump bilges," said Sir Zosimus, observing the flames with satisfaction. "What comes—"

"Forget your own *head*, next. . . . 'Next' comes me sounding the General Assembly."

"Oh yes. So it does. Quite. *Tch.*"

So Sir Rufus Tiburnus proceeded to sound the General Assembly by loudly reciting: " '*Stahitu eno deitu arsmahamo*—' "

"What-what? Not so fast. Stop a bit. 'Arsma*hamo*,' surely you jest?"

" 'Arsma*hamo*.' I do not jest."

"Well, if you say so," said Sir Zosimus, preparing to slip his toga over the top of his head again. If necessary.

"I *do* say so, for the *Tab*lets say so, stop interrupting . . . where was I? Oh. '—*arsmahamo caterahamo iouinur eno com prinuatir precarcris sacris ambretuto ape ambrefurent* . . .' Chaps don't *move*."

"Chaps don't understand a word you're saying, precious lot *they* know about Facing fearful odds/ For the language of their fathers/ And the accents of their gods . . ."

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Sir Rufus sighed a long-suffering sigh. "Hmm, of course they don't, not a word, very well then, very well." He faced the citizenry, and his voice somewhat restored by its bit of a rest, declared right loudly, "*Men of New Iguvium and indeed of all Nova Umbria, men!*"

(The *women* were of course not present; the women, as was only seemly, were all at home, that is, gathered in one another's houses, chastely spinning and weaving: that is, actually, gossiping like mad about seductions and adulteries, abortions and scandalous quarrels, the best recipes for what to do with cold roast sow; and, now and then, and in fact, very often, drawing very impolite pictures of sundry citizens (male) on the earthen floors with the tips of their distaffs, giggling rudely, nibbling barley-and-cheese and eggs and filberts and apples, rubbing out the drawings with many a scornful snort; in general having the time of their lives and, incidentally, avoiding all the cold drafts whistling about the sacred precincts.)

"*Men of New Iguvium and indeed of all Nova Umbria,*" barked Sir Rufus, through cupped hands; " '*Arrange yourselves in priestly and in military ranks, Men of Iguvium!*' **Hunk**!"

(The women, who could hear him quite clearly . . . who was it said that no city should be so large that the voice of a single herald could not be heard throughout it? . . . doesn't matter. New Iguvium qualified . . . the *Women* of New Iguvium, who could hear him quite clearly, imitated his citified accents, and laughed like anything.) The *Men* of New Iguvium, well, the arrangement was done, though not without a great deal of unseemly shuffling; it had, after all, not been done in some while, and some of the younger men of either category proved reluctant to accept the directions of older ones who claimed to remember the proper arrangements (and didn't); but it was at length *done*.

The two knightly priests now passed along the ranks, Sir Zosimus Sulla trotting as rapidly as was consistent with dignity, only pausing now and then to say to perfect strangers, "Good to see you again," "Knew your father," "At school with your uncle, delightful chap," and, "Much good hunting lately?"—

—whereas Sir Rufus Tiburnus, who had thrice commanded legions (once against the Paphlagonians and twice against the Borborygmians), moved along more slowly, with now and again such comments as, "Shoe-latchets don't match, take that man's name," "Call this a purple stripe on your *toga virilis*, Boy? *Shamed* of yourself," and, "Ah. Padre Sahib: all seems in order. Credit to your caste . . ."

Meanwhile: Peregrine. Who said now, to Smaragderos, "Well, I

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really must thank you for this ride. And now, I think . . ."

Really, he had only just begun to move away and had not really moved more than an inch or two; Smaragderos snagged him neatly by slipping one talon in between Peregrine's toe and sandal-thong. "Not to be in such a hurry," said the dragon. "I am really fearfully hungry; all that flying upwind really takes it out of one."

"I am sure that I smell roast pork, and—"

The reptile flickered his nictitating membranes at him. " '*Roast pork!' What?* Do you think I am carnivorous? If I were, I'd have eaten *you*, long ago!"

Peregrine, considering this, shuddered, even though just a little bit. "The wind, you know," he said. "Hungry are you? Well . . ."

Sir Zosimus, as Junior Brother, now declared the Ritual Edict of Banishment on Enemy Aliens, Followers of Infamous Professions, Unlicensed Vendors, Vagrants, Mashers, and Loiterers: as this was a common, as well as secular, declaration, everyone else had heard it heaps of times; and some of the less patriotic in fact flagrantly picked their noses during its recital. But even these, however, listened with great interest to the next item: namely, the Ritual Curse Against All Enemies Far and Near, to wit: " 'On that tribe and that tribe and the other tribe and any other tribe within the meaning of the Criminal Tribes Acts, and on that village and that village and the other village and on any other village within the meaning of the Contumacious Villages Acts, and on the chief citizens in office and the chief citizens not in office, upon the young men in arms and upon the young men not in arms, enemies of this name and that name and any other name: *Anhostatu tursitu tremitu hondu holta ninctu nepitu sonita sauita preplotatu preuilatu . . .*"

" 'Terrify them and cause them to tremble and cast them down into the depths of Hell, overwhelm them with snow and douse them with water, deafen them with thunder and blind them with lightning, and wound and mutilate and trample them down and beat them up and bind them hand and foot!' "

This went over *very* well: from all sides were heard growls of, "Ah, that's the stuff: teach *them* to go a-stealin of our goats and pigs—" "Aye, an lettin they chickings inter our spelt-fieldses!" "Us asn't eard such a good old-fashioned solid all-round curse in *years*: what be next?"

Next, three more hogs were sacrificed (boars, this time), and the Benediction was invoked: as follows: " 'We invoke the immortal gods to grant to the City of New Iguvium and the State of Nova Umbria,

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to the men and women and children, to the beasts and fields thereof, success in word and deed, before and behind, in private and in public, in vow and augury and sacrifice. Be favorable and propitious with the peace, and keep the Iguvians and the Umbrians safe. Keep safe the magistrates, the priesthoods, the Plebs, and the lives of all men and women and children, of fields and fruits and beasts and bees and hives. O thou and those who be invoked, we invoke thee. In truth we invoke thee.' "

On reaching the conclusion of these few words of simple piety, Sir Zosimus paused. "I say, that's rather touching. Felt *touched*."

"Felt so meself," Sir Rufus concurred. "Felt distinctly touched."

"Signal to me secretary to jot 'em down in his tabulae directly, is what I shall do."

The signal was indeed given: the recipient, however, was not Sir Zosimus's secretary (a learned Greek from Philadelphia Antigonia, who had gone to answer that call which e'en king and queen must answer here below), but—the good knight's eyesight no longer being of the keenest—the recipient was an immensely worn and blackened image of exceedingly inferior marble, believed by the Old Pagans to be that of Pismo Krapuvius (Crapovious) (Grabovius), an extremely minor deity of whom absolutely nothing else was known; boys too young to have to pay the two groat admission-fee to The Bath were, merely upon uttering the syllables, *Pismo Crapuvius*, allowed in for free—whereas the Neo-Pagans, who were as down on worshipping idols as any Christian, maintained it was a simulacrum of the notorious Empress Messalina, stripped for her own bath, and/or, conceivably, any other purchase or purposes: but be all this as it may . . .

The Quæstor, misinterpreting both pause and signal, approached (though not too closely) and announced, "Your Holinesses will now proceed to chase the chosen sacred heifers."

"—chase the *what?*—"

". . . heifers . . ."

"Me dear chap, *we* are not going to chase any heifers, sacred or profane; what do you take us for and how young do you think we *are?*"

The Quæstor, whose place had for so long been a mere sinecure, wiped his face upon his sacred mantiple, and said, with a slight sigh, "Ah, but Your Holinesses would naturally not be expected to chase them in propriae personae, but by proxy."

"Our Holinesses *would*n't?" —Sir Zosimus.

"Ah well that's an ox of a different color." —Sir Rufus. "Long as

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it's by proxy, chase what you like: heifers, girls, boys, nanny-goats, cameleopards . . ."

The sacred heifers, lowing lugubriously, were chased by proxy; that is, several yokels who had previously hobbled them, now proceeded to round them up, after which they were officially surreptitiously exchanged for an equal number of swine; the local taste holding that eating heifer was like chewing *gum*, i.e. the oozy resin of the mastic tree, which grew thereabouts as common as filberts.

Sir Zosimus now produced a sound like a whinny; Sir Rufus said he begged his pardon. Sir Zosimus repeated it more slowly.

" 'Eehiianasum.' "

"*Oh* to be sure. 'Eehiianasum,' that's Oscan, isn't it?"

"Course it's Oscan. Means 'chasing the sacred heifers.' "

"Oh. To be sure. . . . Succinct sort of language, one might call it."

"Onomatopœia, one might call it, too."

Sir Zosimus looked at him gravely. "*Shouldn't*, though. Natives might not understand."

And, at just that moment, there was a distinct sort of **Sound** . . . to be so precise, *two* distinct sorts of **Sounds:** the first being quite indescribable; the second very easily describable: this being caused by everyone present attempting at once to go somewhere else with the utmost speed . . . and deciding, very suddenly, not to do so after all. There *is*, after all, very little point in trying to walk or even run away from a dragon . . . even a dragon coming along on foot. . . .

Smaragderos came waddling and walking and wiggling and slithering along. He might have, had he cared to have, left destruction in his wake. He did not care to, and, in fact, did his best to go round rather than over . . . or through . . . whatever stood in his way. . . . This was of course not always possible: for example, a batch of wet cement. . . . Even several centuries later the local residents were pointing out to visitors, "And there be the *foot*prints of the dragon. . . . And *that* be its *tail*. . . ."

Smaragderos came round about the spinial and did his best not to knock over any of the rather tottery walls, gates, and what-have-you. He came, as we say, along . . . and he was, as we have seen (and even if we haven't) a rather *long* dragon. And he came up to within a certain distance of the two visiting priests (six cubits and a span, as some would have it; others would not have it at all). He stopped. He asked, "**You called?**"

There was a certain silence.

Sir Zosimus (to Sir Rufus): "*You* are the Brother Superior. *Answer it!*"

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Sir Rufus: "Hem. Ah. Well, Hum. Mmm. . . . We *did*?"

Smaragderos: "You certainly *did*. 'Winged creatures which fly.' *Did*n't you?"

"Er, *hemph* . . . well, put like *that*, well, *yes*. I suppose we *did*."

Sir Zosimus: "*Aw*fully nice of you to come."

There was a pause.

Then, "You must be rather tired, after your journey."

"I am *very* tired after my journey."

"Perhaps you'd like to wash up, then . . . ?"

"I have already washed up. In the piscina."

Another pause. The fact is, that however well-educated a man may be, be he patrician, knight, priest, or what*ev*er he may be: small talk with dragons is not usually among his abilities. It may be because of this, that, by and by and in after years, every court and castle contained on its payroll someone whose particular duty was to *slay* dragons, how disgusting, but with the decay of empire the arts of conversation and the tolerance for the odd and the curious suffered severe declines; one could hardly imagine, say, Pliny the Elder, feeling obliged to send someone out to slay a dragon; he would

"I am *very* tired after my journey."

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have talked the poor creature to death instead, probably.

"Well, ah, mmm . . . I say! You'd probably like something to *eat*: *would*n't you?"

"Yes yes! The roast sow is all ready, and the roast boar—"

Smaragderos showed his teeth. Even Sir Rufus, who had been three times in charge of legions and had, purely for sport, once chased griffins in Arimaspea, took a step backward. "*Flesh?*" asked Smaragderos. "I *never* eat flesh. It gives me a heartburn upon—well, never mind that. It is however very nice of you to have asked. And, as I was sure that you would, I have already dined. I have eaten the fish in the piscina."

This prompted from, of all people, the Quæstor, the rather startled question of, "What? *All* of them?"

Smaragderos turned his head rather slowly, identified the source of the question—a question which he seemed to regard as in no way unreasonable—and said, "Oh no. Not all of them. Merely the carp, the turbot, the lampreys, the mullet, and the eels. The trash-fish (and, of course, all minnows, fingerlings, and fry) I have as a matter of principle left . . . for *you*. . . ." It was perhaps not entirely clear, Smaragderos having moved his head somewhat, if the *you* were singular or plural. No one, however, cared to ask. The question of the fish in the piscina was, as a matter of fact, and as we are on the subject, a rather interesting one. For ages immemorial, they had been known as "the sacred fish of the Piscina." It was long the custom to go and feed them, as symbols of fertility, or whatever, particularly on holy days and festivals. The first influx of Christians might, one would think, have tempted some of these zealous saints to have done the sacred fish some mischief: not so. It had after all, had it not, been discovered in the Christian Sibbylline Books that the initial letters (in the Greek alphabet) of

Ἰησους
Χρειστος
Θειου
Ὑιος
Σωτηρ

(*Iesus Chreistos Theou Uios Soter*, Jesus Christ Son of God Savior), spelled ΙΧΘΥΣ or *Ichthys*, which means, of course, fish . . . ? It had. Pretty soon every dusty place throughout the Roman Empire was filled with people scratching very impressionistic outlines of *fish* in the dust . . . sometimes with their sticks, sometimes with their fin-

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gers, even in some cases with their toes . . . and next rolling their eyes around to see who would come sidling up to them with an offer to act as guides to the nearest catacombs: also, for reasons obscure to the local yokels of New Iguvium, those of the Newer Persuasion had a devotion for *eat*ing fish . . . on a certain day of the week . . . *could* such be termed as *meats offered to idols*?—evidently they could not. The trade was clandestine (on behalf of both religions), but the trade was brisk.

And if the Quæstor now received the news that the biggest and best of these fish had been all in one meal consumed by a dragon—if the Quæstor seemed somewhat less than immensely pleased, can this be taken as evidence for the sempiternal rumors that the Quæstor connived at the sales of the sacred fish . . . for a share of the profits?—Which of us, indeed, can say?

The Quæstor, at least, for the immediate moment, was saying nothing more at all.

Sirs Rufus Tiburnus and Zosimus Sulla for a moment more stood in a bemused manner, murmuring (once again) to each other, "Awesome powers, these. . . . *Awe*some powers. . . ."

Then, Sir Rufus recollecting himself, his position, and what he owed to it, suddenly snapped—if not precisely to Attention, to something rather close to it—and, with a bow somewhat between medium and deep, said, "Well. Jolly decent of you to come. And, ah, now that you are, ah, *here* . . . is there anything in particular which we can do to make your stay a pleasant one?"

Smaragderos did not give this polite enquiry very long consideration. "No, no," he said. "No, nothing, I think, in particular. I was summoned. I came. I am now, or soon will be, I take it, free to depart—"

"Yes yes! Oh certainly!"

"Free? By all means. Feel free, quite free to—"

The dragon, however, was not yet finished. "—and so, inasmuch as I *have* come all this very long way in response to your summons, I propose to withdraw myself to the farther end of these precincts in order to take some rest, without . . . I trust . . . in the least inconveniencing you . . . and in the meanwhile I shall observe the rest of the ceremonies with interest. With deep interest. *If I may*."

They assured him, all of them, that he indeed might: though of course they tried not to sound excessively, and certainly not impolitely, eager.

It was more or less precisely at this point that a strange voice was heard . . . strange, at any rate, to the Rev. Sir Rufus Tiburnus, Pat.,

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Kt., SPQR Proconsul (Ret.), and to the Rev. Sir Zosimus Sulla, Pat., Kt. Senatusconsultam ad Bacchanilubus (Ret.) . . . heard saying, "Can I get off now, Smarry? 'Your Dragonic Greatness,' I mean? Can I, now? Hey?"

And Peregrine's head, which had, as had the rest of him, been hidden from sight by several of the dragon's coils as well as both of the dragon's wings, was now seen peeping out: and with a most pleading expression on his face. Sir Rufus gave a start. Sir Zosimus made a little jump, or perhaps it was a very small hop. The Quæstor did nothing at all. And from the seats round about the single side of the sacred precincts where the seats had not fallen in, came the sound of voices saying such things as, "Ahr, *that* be the chap as come a-ridin in on the dragon!" "What do it *mean*, does yer suppose?" "Blessed if *hI* know: something *big*, what *hI* suppose!" and so forth. And so on.

"Chap who was riding the dragon," said Sir Rufus.

"Very same chap, indeed," said Sir Zosimus.

"Want to get off now?" asked Smaragderos. "*All* right, then. Shan't need you anymore, anyway. —Hop it, then!"

Peregrine hopped. He had begun to stamp his feet to get the cramps out when he suddenly seemed to notice whom he was facing.

"Very respectful and reverent greetings to Your Very Reverend Sirs," he said. (Smaragderos was by then proceeding to waddle, wiggle, slither, and otherwise make his long way down the long ruinous reaches of the sacred precincts.)

"Chap seems nicely spoken," said Sir Rufus.

"Yes, yes. Evidently gently bred. —Little bit more than a *lad*, though. Brave enough to ride a *drag*on, though. —I say, Rufe, doesn't he seem, hm, doesn't he seem a bit familiar about the form and face?"

Sir Rufus gave Perry a long, reflective look. "By Jove. See what you mean. *Does* look familiar. Hm. Hm. *Ha!* Tell you what: he looks like that lad we were at school with, rustic lad, still, he could construe very well, you know. Zos: construe better than *you*. What *was* the boy's name? Called him 'Pal,' what we called him."

Memory thus nudged, Sir Zosimus cried, "Yes we did! He was an official hostage, I seem to recall, came from Sipodalla, or some such—"

But Peregrine's memory was also being nudged; "Oh, you're *right*!" he exclaimed. "My father *was* a hostage! *His* father, old King Cumnodorius, was getting ready to sign a peace treaty with a Caesar and so Dada had to go down and get to be a hostage while they were

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ironing out the details and they made him go to school . . . yes! He *told* me!" He beamed at the two old men and the two old men beamed at him; he suddenly remembered to say, "And the name of our country is, you really must excuse me, *Sapodilla*, and my father's name is Paladrine and his family name is Pal——"

"Yes yes! You've got his very voice, me boy; his very voice! Except your accent's a bit better, don't mind me saying so; yes: his family name *was* Palæo-something-or-other: '*Pal*,' what we called him."

"Pal. . . . Yes yes . . ."

There was a lot more beaming. Sir Zosimus said, "Well, Prince—"

Perry was perforce obliged to interrupt. "No, sirs, *not* 'Prince.' My father the King has three legitimate sons, but I am not one of them; and that in fact is why . . . indirectly, of course . . . is why I am here: the ancient laws of Sapodilla require that all the king's bastard sons be banished on their eighteenth birthdays, to make sure we don't try to seize the throne, you see; under penalty of 'never returning either alone or with armed host, on penalty of being flayed alive in order to maintain the Peace of the Realm'—nothing personal about any of it, of course: it's the *law*."

Sir Rufus said, "Yes, yes, quite see that, makes sense of a sort. Now what *I* used to do with *my* bastards, made 'em all bankers, is what I did; what used you to do with your bastards, Zos?"

"Made 'em publishers," said Sir Zosimus. "*Some*body's got to do it. . . . Well, well, politics: *one* thing. Welcoming the son of an old school chum, begat *this* side of the blanket or *that* side of the blanket: another. Allow me to embrace you, me boy."

Sir Rufus claimed the same privilege, then they all beamed at each other once again, and then they began to discuss such matters as King Paladrine's health and related matters ("Still so fond of palindromes, is he? He *is*? He *is!*") when a quite new sound was brought to all their ears. And a quite new sight.

"You *see*," Sir Zosimus said, in a quite low voice to Sir Rufus. "What did I tell you? *Barbarian incursions!*"

And right down what had once been the Imperial Way came the *tramp-tramp-tramp* of heavily-armed men, three of them on foot and three of them on horseback.

And in the lead was Baron Bruno.

He saw Peregrine, if not the first thing he saw, as the firstmost thing in the way of immediate business. And at him he pointed his mailed fist.

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"*You!*" he growled. "A precious chase yer've led me, and hI means ter make yer pay fer it. Bind jer in chains, h'is the least of what hI means . . ."

Perry recognized at any rate both the Baron's manner and the Baron's banner: and, also, that whatever other success his trick had had, back at Alf High Town, it had not prevented the High King's brutal brother-in-law from tracking him *here . . . here . . . all the way here* . . . and with a very great deal of very evident malice . . . aforethought . . . afterthought . . . and, most importantly, presentthought. . . .

Sir Tiburnus Rufus wasted not a moment on low-voiced comments. In the same way in which he had already once that day sounded the General Assembly, he now did so again: this time, however, he skipped the original Umbrian. His voice may have been slightly hoarse, but it was very clear and very calm. "Men of New Iguvium and of all Nova Umbria," he began his orders, "Form in military and in priestly ranks: **Hunk!**" The men of New Iguvium and of all Nova Umbria had already had this command once today and so by this its second time they were much quicker about it. For all that they knew to the contrary, the three men on horse and the three men on foot were but the first of hordes; if so . . . well, time enough to see what "if so" . . . in the meanwhile, they recognized that they were under not only Imperial orders, but under experienced Imperial orders. They formed.

The Baron drew his own men to a halt. His eyes flickered rapidly from side to side. He considered.

Now the men of the priestly ranks, during the day's first General Assembly, realizing that the occasion was purely and entirely *pro forma*, had then said nothing. *Now*, they realized, was different. **Quite** different. Their main duty had always been (long though since they had had the chance of publicly performing it) to utter imprecations against enemy invaders. And they now began to utter them. These were not at once clearly heard; for one, their lips at first moved silently; for another, Sir Rufus Tiburnus was giving *his* orders—

"**By the right flank—!**"

Then the voices of the priestly ranks rose next to a whisper and then to a murmur and thence to a mutter and thence to an absolutely blood-crawling weirdly wailing ancient-of-days and throat-tightening-threatening . . .

"Right-**wheel!** Swords **out!**"

"*. . . tetter and tettany . . . ball-crawl, night-crawl and night-*

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mare . . ." they ululated; Baron Bruno's troops began to show the first signs of uneasiness; their eyes shifted, their eyes rolled. "*. . . wang-warts, weewee weevils, hamstringing and hernia . . .*"

"Left-**flank! Column of threes!**"

"*. . . crotch-rot and crapulence and issues of the flesh, and eye-dribble and ear-wiggle . . .*"

"Close up those **ranks**, Men of Iguvium! **One**-two-three-four—"

"*. . . suppurations of the groins . . . incontinence of urine, fœces, and of sperm . . .*"

The troops of the Baron Bruno, who knew but very well that they were *not* but the first of hordes and that absolutely nothing lay behind them, save the long, long way they had come, began to grow extremely uneasy. The Baron, if he had begun to do anything of the sort, did not show it; he merely growled, "Do as hI does." It was his intention to withdraw towards one of the more ruined sides—towards the very end, in fact—of the sacred precincts, and there—

But as for *there*, where there was, as the keen eyes of Baron Bruno had clearly seen, nought but a grass-covered series of hillocks: suddenly there was nothing of the sort *there*: there *was* indeed a "there" there, and this *there* now, not suddenly, but rather very quickly gradually, was revealed to be the form of a dragon . . . not perhaps one of your very largest dragons, but perhaps (per*haps*?) one large enough to do for six men, only three of whom were mounted and all of whom were tired: Smaragderos did not leap, he merely rose up . . . and straightened himself out . . . and o u t . . . and *o u t* . . . and then he gave a hiss like one of those engines which, employing steam, perform such amusing tricks in some of the larger metropolises: Alexandria, for example: and then he issued forth a few of his medium-longer-sized flames of fire . . . and maxi-mesial squawks—

"In close **ranks**," directed Sir Rufus, exactly as though he had the full force of the Borborygmians (or, for that matter, the Paphlagonians) to deal with; "**for-ward, MARCH!**"

Baron Bruno was no coward. But he was no fool, either. He held up his mailed fist. This might have been a defiance. This might have been a submission. This might have been a salute.

He wheeled slowly, ponderously, around on his weary horse. He needed give no new command. Then, followed by his five weary men, he departed as he had come.

And one swift, sullen glance he cast at Peregrine as he passed.

"Demned impudence of the fellow," growled Sir Rufus, the scouts

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having assured him that the small army was indeed gone away . . . going slowly, to be sure, for it was, to be sure, a tired small army . . . very small . . . very tired . . . but going the way it had come: to wit: *away*. "Demned impudence of the fellows, trying to try on their Barbarian, or, if you like, for I like to be fair, their semi-Barbarian incursions, when there haven't even been any proclaimed for this year yet. Well, let him pass the word along: **we are ready**."

Sir Zosimus had his own comment. "What comes next?" he asked.

Informed that they had just won a glorious victory and that their lands and houses and indeed their everything else was not going to be pillaged and destroyed; and that the sacrificial meats were now ready for distribution, the citizenry gave three cheers, and again three cheers; and next came, if not running, then anyway walking very, very fast, although in strict order of precedence, to receive their portions of the sacred roasted swine: those who had dishes, upon dishes; those who had no dishes, upon trenchers; those who had no trenchers, upon the points of their knives: and those who, by reason of poverty, lacked even knives, simply and modestly (or immodestly) lifted up a corner of a garment to which the addition of any amount of grease could make no difference whatsoever. And those who got no crackling were allowed an extra piece of piglet instead, and a chunk of chitterlings apiece.

Some of the Paganry were, it is to be feared, alas intolerant enough to shove portions of these savory roasts under the noses of such Christians as chanced to be encountered round about, and to taunt them with such cries as, "Don't *that* smell *good?*" and, "Wouldn't *you* like to have some?" The Christians were perforce bound to shudder, and, with murmurs of, " '*blood, things strangled, and meats offered to idols*,' feh! and fui!" to turn righteously away: but now and then their nostrils were observed to quiver.

(Some of some of the yokels next looked round to see if they could see any Jews, and try the same taunt; none, however, were to be seen. Reuben, in fact, was at that very moment at home discussing with Simeon the hypothetical case of a man, who having been directed to give his wife a bill of divorcement, chooses to write it, instead of on, say, papyrus or parchment, some other substance; "Valid," said Simeon. "And suppose he writes it on the horn of a cow? Still valid?" "Only if she gets to keep the cow," said Simeon. "Say, there's been a lot of noise outside, hasn't there?" he asked—somewhat rhetorically, one might think. "Wonder what it is?" "Go know," said Reuben. "—And sup*pose* . . .")

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Meanwhile, back at the sacred precincts, the Official Perquisites for the visiting College of Priests were being brought out and counted out upon a large table with a raised rim. The secretary of Sir Rufus was weighing and enumerating them. "One bushel of golden emmerods," he announced.

The secretary of Sir Zosimus said, "*Check.*"

"*Item*, one peck of gold mice."

"*Check.*"

"*Item*, three gold rings for the Elder Brother and three gold rings for the Younger Brother."

"*Check.*"

"*Item*, one silver tassy for the Elder Brother and one silver tassy for the Younger Brother."

"*Check.*"

There they all were, and everyone was allowed to file past and have a good gander at them all. "*Well*," said Sir Rufus, "been a tiring trip and a tiring day, so—"

Peregrine said, "Sir—"

"Not without its interest, its excitement, and its satisfactions, though," commented Sir Zosimus.

"Sir—"

"—so I suggest that we all retire and have a good old lie-down, then I suggest we all go for a nice dip in The Baths—baths still working, here?"

"*Sir!*"

"Ah. 'Heated them up especially for the occasion,' eh: *very* well!"

"Oh, **SIR!**"

The two knights faced him with some small measure of surprise and displeasure. "Now, young man—" "Now, boy—" "What is it, d'you want to come along? *Cer*tainly you may come along, but—" "Not the thing, you know, these iterations and interruptions; sure your father would be the first to agree, so—"

"Oh, but, Sir: *Look!*"

They did look: and just in time to see Smaragderos, without a single previously audible sound, and unnoticed by anyone save Peregrine, come gliding and swooping down: and clutch hold of the entire table with all its gorgeous contents: and go swooping off aloft again: *this* time beating his immense wings and issuing triumphant *squawks*, amidst which and despite the shouts of the knights, might be identified such phrases as, "*. . . revolution . . . oppression . . . reparation . . . exploitation . . .*" and, "*. . . trash-fish. . . .*"

The knights shouted, showed their fists, drew their swords, called

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upon the archers (there were no archers), and then, as the dragon and all his gains vanished off into the most remote distance, fell silent. . . . Only, rather a bit off, the augur Cassandros muttered, "*In the east, Divine Messengers . . .*"; but Cassandros himself was, of course, rather a bit off.

Sir Zosimus, as one has perhaps by now observed, tended to be a bit repetitious. "What comes next?" he enquired.

The Quæstor it was, this time who replied. "What comes next, Your Holinesses," he said, "is that we disburse to Your Holinesses the Official Perquisites; to wit and *videlicet*, One bushel of golden emmerods; *Item*, one peck of—"

Sir Rufus was furious. "Why, what do you mean, you demned old Quæstor, isn't that what you've already done? And see—just see—with what result—!"

"Oh, *no*, Your Holinesses," said the Quæstor, softly. "Not at all. What we have already shown were merely simulacra. Made of brass for the most part and of, merely, silver wash, for another."

Sir Rufus was *still* furious. "*What?* D'you mean you intended to *cheat* us?"

Still softly, said the Quæstor, "Oh, *no*, Your Holinesses. Oh not at all. It is merely that experience has shown us, here in New Iguvium and indeed in all Nova Umbria, that sometimes the sight of treasures acts as a temptation, and therefore as a cause of theft. So we *always* show the fakes first . . . although I admit that we have never had a *dragon* to contend with before: still, it shows the wisdom of our ancestors, as wise today as the day that it were uttered. —Treasure-bearers! Bring forth the genuine treasures!"

Gradually, as, item by item by item, the *real* Official Perquisites were produced and displayed once again, the faces of the elder knights and priests resettled into peaceful lines. Then Sir Rufus fired up all over again. "Why, you demned fool of my secretary, what do you mean by weighing out *brass* as though it were *gold?* I've more than half a mind to feed you to me lampreys, back home!"

And, yet again, yet again, the Quæstor had the final word. "Oh, Your Holinesses, it was not the fault of your secretary: *We had switched the scales. . . .*"

Sir Rufus's face was a study in mixed emotions; on the one hand, he felt that, regardless of this and of that, it was no way to treat an Imperial official . . . and, on the other hand, as in a moment recollected, it was, really, more or the less the same way that had been used at the Comitium, where, with dishonest ballots and of course purely for the good of the Imperium, he and his colleague had been

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elected (or, perhaps, at any rate, selected) for the sacred and Imperial offices which they still held.

So, in a moment, he cleared his throat, and said, "Very much obliged to you, I'm sure."

The Quæstor bowed deeply; at this moment, up came the secretary of Sir Zosimus Sulla, Pat. (*need* we go through all these titles yet again? Did Livy? Did Plutarch? Did Isidore of Seville?), and, saying, "Your Excellency will recollect having asked me to remind you of this," bowed, and withdrew. The *this* was a rather long cylinder of pressed leather, and affixed to it were three immense wax seals, two medium-sized lead seals, one somewhat smaller silver seal . . . and one very, *very* small gold seal: Sir Zosimus gazed at it. "Quite forgot," said he. After a second's thought, he laboriously opened it. Out rolled a parchment of familiar size and shape and decoration, even if its contents were not at once obvious. Sir Zosimus began to read aloud—having, in a stage aside, reminded those near to hand that it had been "Handed to me just as we were setting out hither; 'sailing under sealed orders,' as you might say; not to be opened until . . . until . . . well well: *o*pened, i'n't it: so let's get on. . . ."

It began, as documents of the sort invariably did, **I THE AUGUST CAESAR**, continued with *Princeps Dux Imperatorque*, and, within the compass of a remarkably few lines, managed to include not only every land over which every or rather any Roman emperor anywhere had ever reigned but every single tribe or nation clan horde mob group or even clump of Barbarians over which and with any Roman emperor had ever claimed a conquest, treaty, or confœderation . . .

. . . *seeing that it has pleased the immortal gods to summon* . . .

. . . *wherefore* . . .

. . . inasmuchas . . .

. . . *nor may the curial nor the magistral chairs vacant be* . . .

. . . *therefore reposing* . . .

Sir Zosimus read it all, he read every bit of it all; after all, it was for the greater part in Latin and the rest in Greek: so it was no great task *to* read it all. . . . There was a silence, following the inevitable *and may the immortal gods save the Senate and the People of Rome*. . . . Then Sir Zosimus asked, "*Who* in Jove's name is *G. ZumZumius Aquifer?*"

"Precisely *my* question," said Sir Rufus.

Once again it fell to the Quæstor to reply; at one time his office had been more-or-less confined to that of public treasurer: but . . . and, at any rate, once the ceremonial part of the services were over he had been feeling a great deal more at ease with these importunate

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(though of course exceedingly honorable) foreign—in a manner of speaking—dignitaries . . . once again it fell to the Quæstor to speak in answer to the question.

"Gnaeus ZumZumius Aquifer, Your Holinesses," he said, "was Sub-Imperial-sub-Legate here to Himself The August Caesar, until it pleased the immortal gods to remove him from all duties here below, of a cachexy of the bowels, whilst at stool, the third day after the Gules of August, *ult.*"

A pause. "Chap's *dead*, then," observed Sir Zosimus.

"Your Holinesses. Quite."

And Sir Rufus said, "We seem to be charged with appointing his successor, while we're here."

"Your Holinesses. Quite."

A longer pause. Then, "Pray don't look at *me*," said Sir Zosimus. "Wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole; climate would kill me off in a month."

His Elder Brother cleared his elder throat. "Much as I of course feel and believe that a public office is a public trust," said he; "still . . . me family . . . me age and me infirmities . . ."

They looked at each other. Then they looked at their chief-most local informant. And with one voice said, "Quæ*stor*!"

The Quæstor drew himself up. The Quæstor looked all about him with an air of infinite triumph. The Quæstor's eye met one local eye. Then another. And another. And . . . "I greatly fear, and alas, Your Holinesses," the Quæstor said; "that it really would not do. . . ."

And, after a moment's reflection, the two visiting knights conceded that, really, it would *not* do. "Local chap. Factionalism. Feuds. Gensual ties. Obligations. —No No. Wouldn't *do*," they agreed. They stood in thought, in the rapidly-cooling air. No one said anything. No one, that is, said a word. Peregrine, however, did make a sound. He had *had* a *very* long ride on the dragon; then he'd been standing in the open precincts for quite some time sneaking here a glance and there a glance and considering his chances of a tactful, if brief, sneak-off . . . Peregrine broke wind.

"A sign!" cried . . . someone. And someone else, "A *sign*!"

And, such being the extraordinary popular delusion and the madness of crowds: "*A sign!*" cried everybody else. "*A sign! A sign!*"

Before Peregrine knew what was up (or even Down) he was on his knees, the knights were tapping his shoulders with their swords and thrusting their rings at him to kiss, and all around him were such phrases being rattled off as:

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". . . *Peregrine the son of Paladrine . . .*"

". . . *the grandson of Cumnodorius Rex Confœderatatus to and of . . .*"

". . . *the Divine Gufus, sometime Himself the August Caesar Princeps Dux Imperatorque . . .*"

". . . *and now deified . . .*"

". . . *if illegitimate, we legitimatize thee . . .*"

". . . *if unnaturalized, we naturalize thee . . .*"

". . . *if unqualified, we qualify thee . . .*"

And, there coming finally a pause, as finally there must, Sir Zosimus came to the rescue with one of his last unrecited Umbrian paradigms, or whatever, and, in a tone immensely hieratic and impressive, intoned: "*Slagim, pusme, snata . . .*" and added, by his tone, in evident conclusion: "*Arsmahamo, arsmahamo, arsmahamo.*"

Turning to the throng, for the most part gnawing the last bits of gristle off the sacrificial swine bones, and burping with contentment and loyalty, he announced, "Men of New Iguvium and indeed of all Nova Umbria, I now present to you your new Sub-Imperial-sub-Legate, P. Peregrine Palæosomethingorother: obey him in all things, d'you hear, you clods? And he's to collect all the imposts the Quæstor doesn't snaffle first and to keep what he likes in return for defending and ruling you, save only he's supposed to send on to the Capitol one-half of one-half a half, plus one-quarter of one-quarter plus one half-a-quarter, to pay the Legions, you oafs, d'you hear? And if not, then the Burgundians, the Borborygmians, and the Boogeymensians will all come down and bite your bottoms raw, and so save you right: and now let's hear three *Ave*s and a tiger!"

They heard it.

But whilst all this was going on, the augurs had not ceased trying to tally up their totals in order to produce a single sensible augury bringing the day to an absolutely official conclusion: otherwise, what right had they to their titles?—none. "Three starlings . . ." "No, I tell you it was six starlings . . . and then the woodpeckers . . . No *NO* the hoopoe does *NOT* count . . . crows . . ." and, "Yes yes of course we've done the dragon, old Cassandros and his—"

And then, and then alone, old Cassandros slowly turned from his view of long fetch, and, his whited locks all a-blowing and his beard looking like card-wool in a gale, asked:

"Did no one accompt the ibis in the east?"

"*What* 'ibis in the east?' I swan, Cass, if you aren't—"

"I preach the bird as I see it," said Old Cassandros. And no more.

This previously unprojected prognostication throwing all previous

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reckonings completely off and out, the augurs perforce had to reckon all over again. And, at last, to conclude, that, although twas indeed very odd: all the same, twas very clear; *or*, as some would have it, although twas very clear, still, twas very odd. . . .

The cheers for selection of the newest official had just died down when the augurs in a body approached the visiting priests. "Ah yes. Augur chaps. *Birds*. 'Cheep-cheep,' what? Haw haw. Just our little jest. And what is Your Birdyships's official prognostication?"

The Chief Augur pointed to the exceedingly worn old Obelisk, and/or Simulacrum . . . Pismu Krapuvius? Messalina? Castor without Pollux? Who the hell *knows*?

"You *see*, Your Holinesses; the Lines of Descansion run right along through *here*. And the Haruspexual Lines run right along through *there*. And where they intersect, as any f—*hem*-a-hem—as anyone may plainly see, is *here*. By yon time-blackened piece of masonry, or stone, termed the Obelisk . . . or Simulacrum . . ."

"Yes yes."

"Yes yes."

". . . and the meaning of the auspices is that an inscription must be inscribed upon the said stone according to immemorial custom—"

"Oh, get on with it, get *on* with it: *What* is the inscription?"

The Chief Augur, and indeed, all the other augurs, looked at Sir Rufus (who had interrupted) with a, and in fact with more than a, touch of reproof.

"It is a very *awe*some inscription, Sacred Sires: and this is how it goes: *If two black oxen make doodoo here . . .*"

It was, all agreed (the Jews and Christians did not count; silly little sectarians, their noses had been quite put out of joint by the splendors of the day's events) . . . all agreed, a *most* satisfactory Day of Sacrifice, Ceremony, and Festival: Piety (represented by Paganism) and Patriotism (represented by the newly-appointed Sub-Imperial-sub-Legate of **HIMSELF THE AUGUST CAESAR,** Princeps, Dux, Imperatorque etc. etc., a.k.a. Lucian the Liberator—very soon to be deified—) was, locally, at least, safe.

For the time being.

However long that might be.

And, seated in his chair of office, all sorts of official tunics and togas and straps and swords and bundles of rods and axes and shields and eagles and the gods knew what-all-else piled up round about him, including (as a, gentle, perhaps, hint) a neat heap of receipt

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forms for sundry sorts of taxes, sat Peregrine. He was still either in a state of shock, or at least one of confusion, or else in one so like either other one as to make no difference. One thing alone was certain. He was perplexed. And so he now asked, aloud but really intended not for the citizens who filed past to bow before him—for him*self*—and without at all realizing that he was asking the same question so very often asked throughout the long, long day by Sir Zosimus Sulla:

"What comes next?"

Perhaps no one heard him . . . that is, far off in his cavern of dreams perhaps Gaspar heard him . . . right then and there, though, perhaps no one but the Quæstor heard him; but hear him the Quæstor did. And the Quæstor, if he did not precisely bow, the Quæstor leaned . . . and he leaned close, very close to Peregrine's ear. And the Quæstor said, "Why, that is, must, and will be as Your Honored Excellency pleases. . . ."

Late that night, after a nice hot dip in The Baths and all the rest of it, and after inscribing both their own names and titles plus his own name and title on each silver tassy and presenting one to him, Peregrine, and promising him that the other should be safely sent demned safely and demned expeditiously, by Jove! to his old father the King of Sapodilla, —late that night the two old knights lay at rest in their tent. Sir Zosimus, half-way between the hour that the ox brays in his stall and the hour when the cock crows on his roost, half-awoke, and, in a hoarse and croaking voice, half-cried aloud, "*Slagim, pusme, snata!*" Sir Rufus, with a crisp oath ("Pismo Krapuvius!" perhaps), threw a sandal at him; and, with a single smothered snortle of, "Arsma*hamo*!" he returned to full sleep.

But in his own and new abode—new in the matter of his occupancy of it—where the mice ran in and out between the mouldering old chests, the old mosaics clattered loosely underfoot on the humpy floor, and the stars shown with immemorial and immense indifference through the rents in the roof where old tiles had fallen off; Peregrine remained for long and long awake.

And still perplexed.

THIRD SOLUTION TO ROBOTS OF OZ (from page 181)

Dot for Dorothy, Tot for Toto!

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LETTERS

A critical problem for this—and every SF—magazine is newsstand distribution. Anything you tell us about how easy—or how hard—it is for you to find this magazine in your neighborhood is extremely helpful to us. So, please, let us know!

Letters to the editor—as well as requests for our information sheets on manuscripts and manuscripts themselves—should be addressed to the magazine at Box 13116, Philadelphia PA 19101. Subscription matters and subscription changes of address go to an entirely different address: Box 2650, Greenwich CT 06836. Correspondence about advertising and the like should go to our New York address: 380 Lexington Ave., New York NY 10017.

If you want your address to appear with your letter—should we publish that letter—then put your address at the end of the letter. If you don't, we'll assume you'd rather not have your complete address published; and we'll put only your city and state at the end of your letter.

—George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

After reading "Weird Numbers from Titan" by Martin Gardner in the May issue, I began to wonder why the "doubly weird" sequence should be exempt from collisions similar to the one that frustrated the triply weird numbers. After fruitlessly trying to convince myself that it was, I further enumerated the sequence, only to find a duplication of the number 284 as shown.

1 3 9 20 38 64 100 148 209 284
2 6 11 18 26 36 48 61 75 90 106 123 142 163 185 208 232 257 284
4 5 7 8 10 12 13 14 15 16 17 19 21 22 23 24 25 27

The singly weird sequence, however, cannot have such a problem; the bottom row can never participate in a collision, since it is chosen by finding the smallest integer not yet used. Since it takes two rows to collide, only doubly weird sequences and upward can possibly have unavoidable duplications. Mr. Gardner, I'm surprised at you, not to mention Mr. Sloane!

Sincerely,

Karl Fox
Bell Laboratories
Columbus OH

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Martin Gardner replies:

Karl Fox is right, and Mr. Sloane and I are equally surprised. It looks as if Doug Hofstadter's original weird sequence is unique, and cannot be generalized beyond the first row of differences. As David J. Bell, another reader, pointed out, weird sequences can *be generalized to higher orders if we drop the rule that the first numbers of each row must form a sequence of increasing numbers.*

Dear George:

It was good to see my "Day of the Trifles" in the latest *IA'sfm* and a special honor to have my name on the cover. There's one idiomatic error in my story as printed that you may hear from British readers about, and I'd like them to know that I do know better. On page 80, line 14, it says "an inning and three hundred runs." It should read an "innings." In cricket, unlike baseball, "innings" is both singular and plural. Interestingly enough, I have a story in the current *EQMM*, also with an English background, called "Ruffles Versus Ruffles," and in that story the same erroneous correction to "inning" was made in the course of the copy-editing. I probably should have made some indication in my manuscript not to change the term, but it just didn't occur to me.

All the best,

Jon Breen
Fountain Valley CA

We hope you've kept your sense of humour about this, old chap, as you're one of our favourite writers. In our own defence, let us mention that those colourful British terms and spelling are a bit out of our bailiwick.

—Shawna McCarthy

Mr. Scithers and Dr. Asimov:

To my side is the April issue of your magazine, containing the article "On the Foundations of Science Fiction" by James Gunn. You may deny this, but in my opinion this work is primarily a piece of criticism, in that it defends a particular work against past criticisms. No real problem there: *IA'sfm* presents a book review column each month, essentially criticism; and the readers enjoy and profit

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from it. But the piece of criticism I speak of concerns itself with a work by the Editorial Director of your magazine, Isaac Asimov. I have read the *Foundation* trilogy, enjoyed it thoroughly, and thought Mr. Gunn's comments on it apt, as far as they went. But isn't there something wrong with the idea of running this work in a magazine so closely identified with its subject? If Mr. Gunn had submitted an equally fair and interesting work which found *major* fault with one of Dr. Asimov's works would you have printed it? If your answer was "no," then your magazine is failing to take an objective view—on itself. This has bothered me throughout my year-and-a-half subscription, as your magazine has shown a tendency to overrate itself. While your letters column has shown, in all probability, a representative view of the letters you receive and maybe even of what all your readers think, that doesn't necessarily mean that you should print the sickening assortment of Gee-wow-golly-pat-yourselves-on-the-back-guys letters which dominates *every single* letter column. More critical letters might not be representative, or what your readers *think* that they want; but they might keep those readers interested, thinking, and concerned. *IA'sfm* is a *good* magazine. Don't spoil that by thinking that you are a great one.

Very sincerely,

John Carney
Bell Buckle TN

I must admit that I am not a masochist, nor do I admire masochism. My name on the magazine means that we risk losing potential readers who don't like my writing style. Those who come presumably do like it. Why insult them by knocking their taste? And since I think the magazine is *great, why not say so?*

—Isaac Asimov

We have several more articles by Professor Gunn on Dr. Asimov's works coming up. Elsewhere in this series, he does indeed find fault with some of these works; but on the whole he praises them. But then, if he didn't think them good enough to be worth writing a series of critical articles about, there would have been no articles at all.

The articles by Professor Gunn have been bought by the editor—Mr. Scithers—without consulting the Editorial Director—Dr. Asimov —on the matter.

—George H. Scithers

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Dear Isaac:

I read your editorial in the May issue with greater-than-usual interest. Since the first thing I have always turned to when buying a new issue of a SF magazine is the letter column (when there is one), I found your thoughts on the subject of letter columns particularly pertinent.

The letter column in *IA'sfm* strikes me as about half of what it could and should be. Let me explain.

My memories of the field don't go back quite as far as yours, but I started out on the SF pulps of the late forties and early fifties. You remember—the ones with twenty pages of tiny type in the back devoted to letters: *Thrilling Wonder Stories, Startling Stories, Planet Stories*. The letter columns in *Startling* and *Thrilling Wonder* under Sam Mines in particular were strong favorites, rivaled for me only by Ray Palmer's idiosyncratic letter columns in *Other Worlds*. In all of these one felt a genuine sense of communication—both between the readers and the editor and between the readers themselves. There was, in microcosm, a sense of community not unlike that sense of community we all enjoyed in the SF field then.

When I was editor of *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Stories* I tried to revive the feeling I had gotten from those earlier letter columns—and a number of people were kind enough to tell me that I had succeeded. (Ed Ferman once told me that he envied me my letter columns. "How do you get those marvelous letters, Ted?" he asked me. My answer was, "By printing them when they come in.")

I think the key is volume. One has to have the capacity to publish letters of more than three short paragraphs. Properly conducted, a letter column can be like a fascinating party at a SF convention, where the conversation is stimulating and entertaining.

But you need that room—room in which short pithy comments can alternate with longer expositions. (Already, I fear this letter is too long for you.) My recommendation: smaller-sized type in double-columns. There is no reason why letters should be published in the same large, single-column-width type used for your stories; you could publish twice the wordage in the same number of pages. (The same suggestion might be applied to your other non-fiction features to good advantage.) That would appease those readers who would prefer more stories (or no less of them), while giving your letter column a little more breathing room.

With all best wishes,

Ted White
New York NY

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You have a point, Ted; but small type, double columns, and long letters, while fine for a few devotees, can be formidable and distasteful for the average reader.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

In your May editorial, you mentioned that some readers have taken you to task for including only favorable comments in your letter column. I offer this epistle in an effort to redress the balance. May I level the following criticisms at your magazine:

It makes a terrible doorstop. Using it as such only crinkles the cover more than the P.O. would ordinarily.

Chopped up finely and mixed with condensed milk, it is totally useless as armadillo feed. Mine took one slurp and *P-toohey!* I might point out that he daily gobbles up stacks of *Analog*.

The magazine does not sail well. A Frisbee does much better for this purpose. Aerodynamically, *IA'sfm* is ill-conceived, at best. (It might be the address sticker—excess drag, perhaps.)

Rigged with blasting caps and wired to a good detonator, it will *not* take out a stubborn tree stump. In fact, it barely explodes at all. (I have test results to back up this claim.)

Contrary to some reports, your periodical does not relieve the pain of herpes. Sorry.

I'm afraid that other than being a good SF magazine, *IA'sfm* is a fiasco. I hope you take these comments in the constructive spirit in which they were offered.

Sincerely,

John DeChancie
Pittsburgh PA

It's not very efficient at warding off the rain, either. Not large enough!

—Isaac Asimov

NEXT ISSUE

Barry B. Longyear returns with another tale of Red Miklynn and the Ninth Quadrant Terraform Corps, last seen in "Project Fear" in our January 1980 issue. This time, Red and the crew confront a challenge more difficult than any they've yet faced. Don't miss "Catch the Sun," with a cover illustration by Wayne D. Barlowe. In addition, Sydney J. Van Scyoc will be back with another tale of Bakrath; Algis Budrys reviews *The Empire Strikes Back;* and Your Editor explores a spaceport bar with John M. Ford and Barry B. Longyear. On sale October 23.

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